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ABSTRACT

A handbook for foreign teaching assistants (TAs) is presented by foreign graduate students with teaching experience and other educators who have worked closely with them. Language skills, teaching strategies, cultural issues, resources, and the environment at the University of California, Berkeley, are addressed in 16 articles. Article titles and authors are: "English and the Foreign-Born TA" (Jacqueline Hoeppner-Freitas); "Overcoming the Language Barrier" (Jia-Yush Yen); "Listening Comprehension and Accent Problems" (Dong-Gyom Kim); "How Do Americans Speak?" (Bonnie Burns); "Getting To Know the System" (Stephen Small); "How To Teach without Talking" (Eyal Naveh); "Leading Sections in the Sciences" (Rajesh Gupta); "Grading Humanities Students" (E. Naveh); "Grading Options in the Sciences" (Prabhakar Raghavan); "Student Evaluations of TAs (Ron Robin); "Foreign TAs from the Undergraduate Perspective" (David Pickell); "A Woman, A Foreigner, a TA" (Jyoti Sanghera); "Advantages of Foreign TAs" (John Quansheng Zhao); "Oral Communication Resources" (Barbara Gross Davis); "Peer Counseling and Support for Foreign TAs" (Ron Robin, Alan Cox); and "Advisers to Foreign Students and Scholars Office (AFSSO)" (Ted Goode). (SW)

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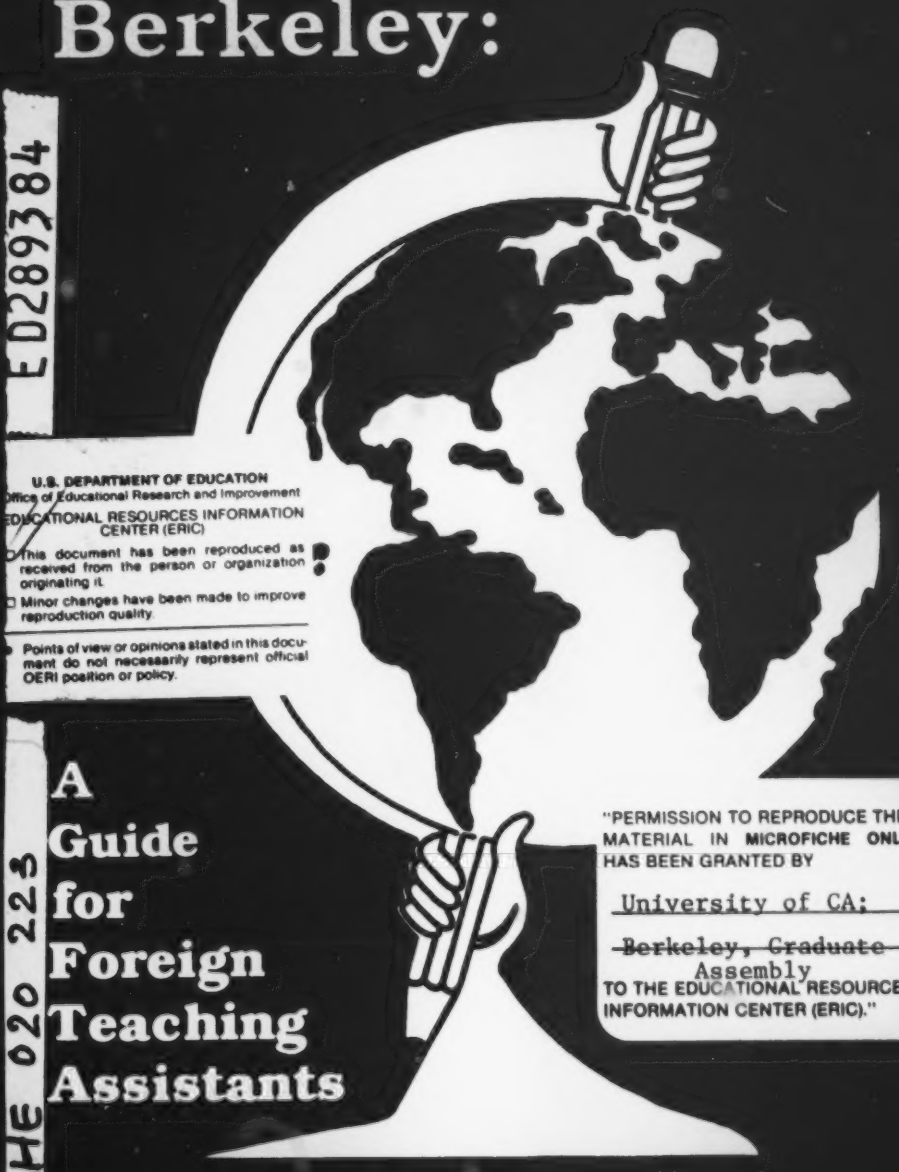

A Guide for Foreign Teaching Assistants

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Teaching at Berkeley:

A Guide for Foreign Teaching Assistants

Edited by Robby Cohen and Ron Robin

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Preface

Teaching is one of the most difficult and demanding of professions, because its effectiveness requires not only the mastery of a body of knowledge, but the ability to communicate that information. These "communication skills" are not simple, nor easy to learn; their acquisition requires concentration and commitment, and an understanding, on the teachers' part, of themselves and their students. Experience in teaching, so crucial to the mastery of its skills and mysteries, begins early at Berkeley for large numbers of graduate students. This experience, this apprenticeship in the art of teaching, is an integral part of their academic training. In the past decade or so, the campus has become more aware of, and sensitive to, the problems of the fledgling instructor, and has taken some steps (not enough, in the

opinion of some observers) to tackle those problems. One important contribution was the publication, in 1984, of the handbook *Learning to Teach*, which addresses many of the issues and concerns of TAs on this campus.

The publication of an additional instructional manual, focusing specifically on foreign TAs, is a response to the awareness, by themselves and by others, of the special problems that confront those who are teaching in an alien academic environment, in a language that is not native to them, and working with students whose cultural backgrounds and interests are quite different from their own. This handbook has two important merits. First, it recognizes and discusses those problems which are peculiarly those of the foreign instructor in an American university, and which pertain as much to experienced academics coming from abroad as to young instructors who may be teaching here for the first time in their lives. Secondly, this manual identifies the resources available on this campus to foreign TAs, to provide them with information and support, to assist them in developing their teaching skills, and in understanding Berkeley's academic milieu. I know that I speak for the campus administration and for the faculty in commending the editors and the authors of this handbook for their most valuable service to our common teaching enterprise. We welcome the new foreign TAs to the ranks of the University's teaching corps.

Gene Brucker, Chair
Academic Senate, Berkeley Division

Table of Contents

Introduction 7

Language Skills

English and the Foreign-born TA 10
Jacqueline Hoeppner-Freitas

Overcoming the Language Barrier 17
Jia-Yush Yen

Listening Comprehension and Accent Problems 22
Dong-Gyom Kim

How Do Americans Speak? 26
Bonnie Burns

Teaching Strategies

Getting to Know the System 30
Stephen Small

How To Teach Without Talking 35
Eyal Naveh

Leading Sections in the Sciences 40
Rajesh Gupta

Grading Humanities Students 43
Eyal Naveh

Grading Options in the Sciences 47
Prabhakar Raghavan

Student Evaluations of TAs 51
Ron Robin

Cultural Issues

Foreign TAs from the Undergraduate Perspective 57
David Pickell

A Woman, a Foreigner, a TA 62
Jyoti Sanghera

Advantages of Foreign TAs 65
John Quansheng Zhao

Resources

Oral Communication Resources 69
Barbara Gross Davis

Peer Counseling and Support for Foreign TAs 74
Ron Robin and Alan Cox

Advisers to Foreign Students and Scholars Office (AFSSO) 77
Ted Goode

Contributors 79

Introduction

The University of California at Berkeley is known for its ability to attract outstanding graduate students from all over the world. As is the case with most graduate students at U.C. Berkeley, a significant number of these foreign scholars are active participants in the university's instructional network. Approximately thirteen percent of U.C. Berkeley's teaching assistants are from non-English speaking countries; an additional two to three percent are foreigners who list English as their native language.

Foreign TAs and their American colleagues encounter similar teaching, employment, and educational problems. Inexperience, the lack of formal pedagogical training, and a demanding study load are common obstacles shared by all TAs. Yet, the average foreign TA must overcome many unique barriers, too. Lacking familiarity with American culture, and often hampered by an imperfect command of American English, foreign TAs soon discover the need to re-evaluate their most fundamental concepts of teaching. Identifying the idiosyncracies of colloquial English, unearthing the un-

written laws of student-teacher relations, comprehending local grading concepts, and even recognizing such subtle features of American life as dress codes are only some of the problems that foreign TAs confront. This handbook is designed to provide advice and information for a speedy resolution of these problems.

The foreign teaching assistant handbook is written by foreign graduate students with teaching experience and other educators who have worked closely with them. The handbook is divided into four sections: Language Skills, Teaching Strategies, Cultural Issues, and Resources. These sections offer advice and describe campus resources which can help foreign TAs overcome the cultural, pedagogical and language barriers inherent in the American college environment.

This publication should be read and used in conjunction with *Learning To Teach*, the general handbook for teaching assistants at U.C. Berkeley published by the Graduate Assembly. All too often common teaching problems are attributed erroneously to the linguistic or cultural deficiencies of non-Americans. In actual fact the lack of systematic programs for instilling TAs—both American and foreign—with the fundamentals of teaching is often the root cause of many of these complaints. By using the two handbooks together, foreign TAs should be as ready as their American colleagues to face the demanding task of teaching themselves to teach.

Funding for this handbook has been generously provided by the Committee on Graduate Student Instructors. However, this is not an official university publication. The demand for this handbook has come from the ranks of foreign TAs. The following suggestions and guidelines reflect the concerns of foreign graduate students and their sincere desire to improve undergraduate education at U.C. Berkeley. In publishing this book, the Graduate Assembly hopes to help foreign TAs overcome their teaching problems. But publication of this book is not meant to imply that foreign TAs are a "problem." Indeed, the Graduate Assembly and all the contributors to this handbook are convinced that the presence of foreign TAs at U.C. Berkeley enriches the academic community— helping to provide the cosmopolitan and intellectually charged atmosphere befitting a great university.

Robby Cohen and Ron Robin

Language Skills

Foreign TAs often identify language issues as the most unsettling aspect of their teaching experiences at U.C. Berkeley. In addition to making cultural adjustments, non-American instructors face the complex task of communicating in a foreign language. This section of the handbook is designed to help TAs overcome language barriers. The articles in this section discuss strategies for enhancing English comprehension and classroom communication.

English and the Foreign-born TA

Jacqueline Hoeppner-Freitas

You, the foreign-born TA at U.C. Berkeley, have special problems which this *Handbook* seeks to address. The English language is only one of the difficulties you face, but easy access to it can reduce the many other strains that come with living, studying and teaching in a foreign land. If you feel uncomfortable speaking English, every day will be a struggle. I know this because for ten years I have taught English as a second language to many hundreds of students, some of whom have been TAs. I wish in this article to pass on to you some of the collective wisdom about learning English that my students have taught me. I also wish to advise you of the English language training resources available at U.C. Berkeley.

The Listening Comprehension Factor

If you are newly arrived in the United States and have heard very little native-speaker English, you are in for a huge surprise. When you begin your first conversation, you may expect to hear some polite questions such as "How are you?," "Where are you living?," "Where are you from?," "What's your name?," and "Did you get your classes yet?" Instead, you hear "How are ya?," and "Where ya livin'?," "Where ya from?," "Whatcher name?," and "Didja getcher classes yet?" Is this English? Yes, it's perfectly normal spoken English, but your ear has to have a chance to get used to it. You may think that you can't understand because your vocabulary is not large enough, but you will be surprised to find out that much of the language you are hearing is well-known to you in books. You

simply have to "tune into" the sounds of American English.

The best remedy for this "language shock" is to immerse yourself in English. DON'T avoid speaking English. DON'T stick to speakers of your native language. DO cultivate American friends. DO go to welcome parties. DO ask people in your department for help. DO ask questions of Americans on the street. DO get a TV and watch it when you can. DO get a radio and listen to it as much as possible. DO go to an English language movie whenever possible. DO read newspapers like *The Daily Californian* (the free on-campus newspaper), the *Oakland Tribune* (which covers the East Bay), or the *San Francisco Chronicle*.

This contact with English is important for more than just language learning reasons. If you know what's going on around the area in entertainment, politics and sports, you will be able to understand the references people make. Many incidents of misunderstanding are simply a matter of not knowing the cultural and political information that everyone else takes for granted. For this reason, the local news may not be the best program for you to watch at the beginning. The many local references will make you feel that your English is not as good as it really is. Remember, an American moving to Berkeley from another part of the U.S. would also be confused by local references. If, on the other hand, you have a chance first to read the local and/or national news and then watch it on TV, this could improve your listening comprehension. For language learning purposes, it might also be wise in the beginning to choose programs that have easily understandable content, such as game shows and soap operas. (See Note below.) Summaries of soap opera plots are available in magazines and newspapers (see Saturday's *Oakland Tribune*). Those who don't have a TV or who wish to have more control over what they see may go to the Dwinelle Hall Language Laboratory or the Moffitt Library Audio-Visual Media Center (see Resources below). Here, in very pleasant surroundings, you can watch and/or listen to videotapes, audio tapes, and/or records on every imaginable subject. You can, for example, buy a copy of *The Miracle Worker*, a play about a famous blind and deaf American, and then go to Moffitt Library and watch the performance on videotape. Being able to read it as well as watch and listen to it will help your aural comprehension. In the process, you will learn about Helen Keller, a person well-known to almost every

American. You may or may not admire famous Americans, may or may not wish to emulate American customs, but being informed about the United States and its culture will help your listening comprehension.

The Pronunciation Factor

There is probably no other area of language difficulty that causes you as a teaching assistant more concern than your pronunciation. You may feel exposed and vulnerable to criticism from your students. This fear is very real since students sometimes try to blame their difficulties in a course on their TA's pronunciation. And, unfortunately, the American English pronunciation system is a very difficult one to master. Many languages have a perfectly adequate five-vowel system. English has at least thirteen. In addition, the stress and intonation patterns of your native language may differ radically from those of English. So, how should you go about improving your pronunciation?

Pronunciation is, of course, best improved with the aid of a knowledgeable English teacher. But the single most important factor in improving pronunciation, experts say, is the motivation of the speaker. If you are not willing to attend to the elements that make American English pronunciation so different from your native language, and to spend time practicing your pronunciation, you will not be able to improve with all the most expert help in the world. It's like trying to become a good tennis player or guitar player without practicing. It takes practice time and a certain quality of attention to improve. Through repetition you must train your tongue and lips to the point that the sounds will be produced automatically, without thinking. I always tell my students to practice the sounds of English in front of a mirror whenever possible in order to watch the movements of the mouth. In addition, you can find many little blocks of time during the day when you can repeat words and sentences for practice. When you are walking to and from class, you can be rehearsing some sentences, either in your mind or out loud. If you don't want to be heard talking to yourself, you can practice in the shower. With repetition you will lose your self-consciousness at producing such unusual sounds. But it all begins with motivation. A student of mine from Korea said

that everywhere he went, on buses and on the street, he listened to tapes and repeated what he heard. He said he didn't care what people thought. And his English is now native-speaker quality, an amazing fact given that he did not grow up with any native speakers of English around him. The factor that most sets people like him apart is that he cared tremendously how his English sounded.

You can turn to the following resources to improve your pronunciation. The Language Laboratory in the basement of Dwinelle Hall has pronunciation tapes (see Resources below). You can also make your own tapes at home by getting an American friend to read a short passage or dialogue on to a tape with pauses long enough for you to repeat. You must ask your American friends to read at natural speed, however, and tell them not to be tempted to slow down and enunciate "more correctly." Most Americans, untrained in linguistics, mistakenly think that rapid spoken English is somehow "incorrect." They don't realize that that's how *everybody* speaks, professors and professionals included. Correct spoken English is delivered rapidly with many elisions and reductions. Whole sounds and words are reduced to schwa (ə) or eliminated completely. So the trick is to get your American helper to speak in to the tape recorder just as she or he would on the phone to an American friend.

Of course, before you begin practicing, it is wise to get a pronunciation assessment from a trained teacher of English as a second language. On a limited basis and by appointment, such an assessment is offered by the U.C. Berkeley Extension English Language Program, exclusively for foreign-born teaching assistants. We will provide a list of some of your most serious pronunciation problems with sentences to practice on a tape recorder. We can also refer you to materials available in the language laboratory. Call 642-9833 and ask for Ellen Rosenfield if you wish such help.

The Cross-Cultural Factor

Sometimes other factors besides language difficulties prevent effective communication. When a TA and a student experience confusion and possibly even hostility towards each other, a TA might easily jump to the conclusion that his/her language ability is at fault. While this may be the case, often other factors are involved. For one thing, as with native speakers, personality differences can cause misunderstand-

ing between TAs and students. The most important factor, however, and one very easily overlooked, may be cultural differences. These differences can account for much of the failed communication between the foreign-born TA and the American student. Some students, out of their own ethnocentricity, may make little attempt, if any, to understand their TA's personality, attitudes and culture. It should come as no surprise, then, that this kind of student may be irritated by TA's foreign accent and "strange ways." If, for example, the TA speaks softly and avoids eye contact while teaching, the student may assume the TA is insecure, unprepared, or, even worse, ignorant. The student may not have the sophistication or the desire to look beyond the surface at the cultural differences. Studies have shown that the single most important factor influencing communication success between foreign-born TAs and American students may be the extent of the *students'* ethnocentricity.

Fortunately, not all American students lack the ability to appreciate and understand other cultures. But the foreign-born TA must be aware that such students exist and must take steps to reduce the negative effect that the inevitable cross-cultural misunderstandings will have on the class. It is therefore advisable for the foreign-born TA to learn as much as possible about American culture. Again, one need not turn to books alone for information. By watching people you can attune yourself, for example, to American-style gestures, posture and eye contact. You might notice that it is common for Americans to listen politely by looking (not staring) at the speaker and nodding and saying, "Uh-huh" once in a while to demonstrate interest. On the other hand, speakers look at their listeners briefly, look away, continue talking and then establish eye contact again. It's as if the speaker must "check in" with the listener every so often to make sure the listener is attentive. These and many other conventions comprise a large body of culturally bound behavior that needs to be understood to bring about effective communication in the classroom.

Of course, the TA must also deal with a natural inclination to find American ways strange and even undesirable. For example, the loud voices that Americans often use in conversation may irritate those from other cultures who appreciate nuance and subtlety more than volume.

We recommend an excellent videotape, *Take Two*, which illustrates cross-cultural misunderstandings in one-on-one situations. You may make an appointment at the English Language Program to see this video. We can also recommend readings on this subject which may help you to become more sensitive to the very important factor of cross-cultural communication. But perhaps the best way to reduce your anxiety over this factor and at the same time reduce the negative impact of cultural differences is to establish a personal, though professional, relationship with each of your students as soon as possible. This can be done by monitoring each student's progress and helping each one individually to the extent feasible.

Summary

Don't hide from English. Seek it out in every way possible. Again and again I have seen foreign students retreat from contact with English, spending time only with friends from their own language group. Though tempting, this is the single most serious mistake you can make. You will be here for several years. To make it an enjoyable and rewarding experience rather than one of isolation and fear, *force* yourself from the beginning to seek out English in every possible context, even if it's only the English of street posters or throw-away advertisements. English is not just in books. In fact, some people argue that you *can't* find the "real" English in books. If you think of every native speaker of English around you as a resource, you are fighting the English battle in the right way.

Resources

Books for Purchase: English as a second language texts and English-English dictionaries for the foreign student are available at Campus Textbook Exchange, 2470 Bancroft Way, or may be ordered from Alta California Book Center, 14 Adrian Court, Burlingame, CA. Phone: 692-1285.

Tapes for Purchase: English as a second language audio tapes can be purchased from Alta California Books (see Books above), but are rather expensive. A very limited selection of tapes can be purchased inexpensively through the Language Laboratory, Dwinelle Hall (see Audio-Visual Aids below).

Audio-Visual Aids: When school is in session, the Audio-Visual Media Center, 150 Moffitt (undergraduate) Library, 642-8197, is open Fri. 9am-5pm; Sat. 10am-5pm; and Sun.

1pm-10pm. Call the Center for vacation schedules.

The Language Laboratory (LL) is in the Dwinelle Hall basement (south side of the building). Information and tapes are available at B-50. Some tapes are available on loan from B-1. The video cassette viewing room is B-22. The LL will also produce at-cost copies of some taped materials in 33 Dwinelle. Call 642-4067. The hours vary depending on the service, but in general the LL is open Mon.-Thurs. 8am-6pm; Fri. 8am-5pm; Sat. 10am-4pm. During exams and vacation, the schedule changes.

The Television Office, 9 Dwinelle Hall, also has videotapes available. Hours: Mon.-Fri. 9am-noon, 1pm-5pm.

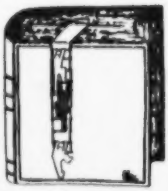
See also Barbara Davis' article, "Oral Communication Resources," on page 69 of this handbook.

Note

If you don't know what a "soap opera" is, ask an American. I give my students assignments to stop people on the street and ask questions. I recommend this method of practicing English. For example, you could say, "Excuse me, I'm a foreign student here and my English teacher gave me an assignment to find out what a 'soap opera' is. Can you help me?" They have found that many Americans are happy to help. If somebody refuses to help, say, "Thanks anyway." Choose people who do not look busy and who don't seem strange. Beware of people who are members of religious groups such as the Unification Church ("the Moonies"), who are always looking for new members, especially among foreign students.

Overcoming the Language Barrier

Jia-Yush Yen



Using a foreign language is often a struggle. Many new international students at Berkeley avoid this problem by staying with colleagues from their native country and not speaking English at all. This method of retreating from the alien American environment is understandable because it cuts down on culture shock and does seem to save one a lot of trouble, but foreign graduate students who are going to be teaching at U.C. Berkeley will have to find a better solution. If you wait until you begin teaching to start adjusting to American language and culture, you are likely to heighten the difficulties inherent in foreign TA instruction at Berkeley.

Although Berkeley is a cosmopolitan campus, undergraduates here are young and may have parochial tendencies. They do not expect to be taught by a teaching assistant who comes from a foreign country, and may assume that a foreign accent means that their TA is not first rate (a common American assumption is that all intelligent people must speak flawless English). Such negative assumptions about foreign TAs may be compounded if you are overly nervous, since this may encourage students to lose confidence in you. It will take a lot of effort to gain their respect. Therefore it is wise to prepare to meet the problems as early as possible.

The following advice is designed to help you recognize and overcome language problems which foreign TAs often face at U.C. Berkeley.

Use Every Chance to Practice Your English

The only way to make your English an effective tool for your

teaching is to make it your daily means of communication. Students appreciate the TA who can react effortlessly to their questions, and who can understand their questions the first time they are raised. If students have to explain their questions several times to the TA, frustration leaves the students unwilling to ask questions—a situation particularly damaging in discussion sections, which are designed specifically to address student questions. The most effective way to sharpen the language skills you will need for teaching is to find yourself an English-speaking roommate or friend, preferably one who does not speak your native language. You can also improve your English speaking and comprehension by watching television and listening to the radio. Reading out loud can also help improve your pronunciation.

Try to Think in English

The trick in learning to communicate effectively with your students is to think in English. If you have to go to your class without any time to practice, switching into English thinking mode can improve your English a great deal. This is especially true for TAs who come from Oriental countries that have language structures entirely different from English. If they think in their native language and then translate into English, they will have great difficulty making themselves understood. The sequence of expressing thoughts differs from language to language. Having Chinese as my native language means that the last thing to be said in English is always the first thing that occurs in my mind. Consequently, I always have to break one long sentence into several shorter sentences.

Another confusing point for me was using "Yes-No" sentences. When the question is "Isn't it?," your "No" still means no, and your "Yes" still means yes. Some languages do not have tenses and genders. Non-native speakers often confuse their listeners by using the wrong tense and gender. The definite article "the" can stress the key point you want to emphasize, but it makes an awkward sentence without proper usage. The use of the plural form needs extensive attention. Careless speakers confuse students by saying things in singular form, while actually referring to the plural. If you are a more experienced English speaker, you might want to pay some attention to the prepositions.

Now, the question arises as to how one can actually consider so many problems and features of the English

language before speaking. This will have to be built up gradually by practicing constantly. Each time you practice a sentence, you build up a sentence structure in your mind. When the time comes to use such structures, they will automatically occur to you.

When using a language like English it is very important to pronounce each word clearly in order to transmit information accurately. Most foreigners have already adopted their native pronunciation style. It is very difficult for one to correct accent problems in a short time. Since we have to live with our accents, it is better not to agonize over this. To help your students overcome the potential barrier to comprehension that your accent may pose, it is crucial that you speak as slowly and clearly as possible.

Have Confidence in Yourself

Familiarizing yourself with class materials is the best way to build up your own confidence. If you are well prepared and fully understand all the concepts and reading for the class, this will help you speak more smoothly. The new concepts you are teaching rather than your language barrier should grab the students' attention. When you are really on top of the class material and have developed interesting ways to present it to the students, your accent, sentences, grammar and phrases —even if imperfect—will be less noticeable to students.

The degree of self-confidence you display influences the students' image of you. If students see that you have both a good grasp of the subject matter and faith in your ability to teach, they are more likely to respect you. Once you've gotten that respect, you are unlikely to encounter unjust complaints from the class. Students will take notes, ask questions, make appointments for individual instruction, and do anything else they can to understand you if they have confidence in you. Most of this confidence must be built up by the TA through conscientious efforts at effective teaching.

Before you step into your first class, it is valuable to consult your supervising professor and an experienced TA about what you should expect from the students, and how best to facilitate discussions, lead lab sections, or offer suitable lectures (TA responsibilities vary from department to department, so such consultation is critical). If you are able to learn about the students' needs and backgrounds prior to the start of the semester, this will reduce your worries before the class. It is critical that you inquire as to the level of knowledge of

your students. Even if your English is perfect, your students will be unable to understand you if you assume too much and teach on a higher level than they can comprehend.

Carefully Prepare Your Lecture or Questions

A good instructor always comes to section with at least a tentative plan for conducting the class. Before you enter the class you should already have thought about what you want the lecture or class discussion to cover, and how this material can most effectively be taught. If you are insecure about your English you may want to write down everything you want to say in advance. But if at all possible, try to break away from complete reliance on notes, so that there is more give and take between yourself and your students. American students like this and often learn more efficiently if they are drawn into spontaneous intellectual interactions with their classmates and TAs.

Make Extensive Use of the Blackboard

If the TA writes clearly and in a well organized fashion on the blackboard, it can serve as one of the most useful teaching tools. Many students find that a blackboard filled with key concepts expedites their comprehension of class materials. Since most foreign TAs write well in English (or at least better than they speak it), extensive use of the blackboard is in effect a way of playing to their strength. A well organized blackboard not only assists your students, but can also help you proceed through the lecture, discussion, or lab section by section. Write down as much as you can on the blackboard when explaining complex ideas and problems. If you feel that your spoken English is weak, you may want to write on the board almost everything you say. By using the blackboard you double the students' chances of understanding the material because they will be simultaneously hearing and seeing what they need to learn. This is particularly valuable with accent problems, because if they have difficulty understanding a word or phrase you are using, they will be able to look on the board and pick up that word or phrase—thereby overcoming a potential language problem.

Use Visual Aides Wherever Possible

It is much easier to show a ball than to draw one and then

try to explain it. If the model is available do not hesitate to use it. In lab courses it is much easier to operate the experiment once in front of the students than to explain all the complex procedures without visual aides. Audio-visual aids such as slides, photographs, movies, and music are often helpful in the social sciences and humanities; they are extremely effective ways to illustrate hard-to-explain points. As twentieth century America is in essence a visual culture, you will find that your students appreciate these methods.

The University provides videotaping services to record one of your class meetings. You should take advantage of this service to analyze your teaching performance. You can learn a lot from such taping, and will see, for instance, that effective teaching depends not only on speaking correctly but also on an overall sensitivity and responsiveness to your students as well as a good grasp of the material you are teaching. If you prepare well, work hard, and care about your students, you will be a good TA—even if your accent isn't as perfect as Walter Cronkite's.

Summary

- Improve your communication by thinking in English, using short sentences, paying attention to the basics (gender, tenses, etc.).
- Speak slowly instead of assuming an American accent.
- Present a confident image of a TA well prepared for the course.
- Use the blackboard and visual aids extensively.
- Be sure the students understand the material as well as your English.
- Consult more experienced TAs and faculty so that you have realistic expectations regarding the students' level of preparation.

Listening Comprehension and Accent Problems

Dong-Gyom Kim

"Sure."

I almost felt insulted when I heard this blunt reply to my heartfelt, "Thank you very much." It seemed to me to say, "Yes, I sure deserve your thanks." What else could I have made of it? After all, it was only a couple of days after I arrived in this country. It was a long time before I realized that "sure" is such a versatile word, a word that one can use to answer not only an are-you-sure question, but also a would-you request and and even a thank-you.

Studying abroad is certainly an exciting experience. Unless you are already accustomed to the new language, however, you must face annoying language problems, especially if you have to TA. What a language English is: Virtually anything can be used as a verb! I was really nervous in my first section meeting, where I had to speak for a whole hour in a language which I had hardly ever spoken for more than thirty seconds at a time. I had to ask my students constantly to repeat their questions, and then it took me what seemed like hours and hours to think out the right words for what I wanted to say.

Practicing English

Something had to be done about my difficulties. So I started watching TV a lot, even Sesame Street and Bugs Bunny cartoons. I tried hard to understand the dialogue from movies and also conversations over dinners, and sometimes I even tried to overhear people sitting next to me on BART trains. I apologize to those I overheard. And it paid off; all those

incredibly fast speakers appeared to be slowing down and their voices got louder and clearer. Among my happiest moments were those in which I found myself almost completely understanding people whose speech a semester earlier I could follow only fifty percent.

Learning by Listening

In many ways, making oneself understood can be more difficult than understanding others. Even if you say something that makes perfect sense, it may not be the way others would say it. For instance, none of my students would "substitute" A for B in a mathematical expression; they would just "plug" the one in for the other. It took me quite a long time to learn to plug something in instead of substituting it. I didn't want to sound like a recording from their textbook. So I listened carefully to what people said, and tried to imitate.

I have a friend, who, I am sure, thinks I am stupid because I don't understand what he says and keep asking him silly questions. Every day he teases me with a different way of saying hello: "How are you doing?," "What's up?," "How's life?," "How's it going?," "Howdy," and so forth. He seems to take pleasure in seeing my confused face, but he is such a good friend. For now I know the chances are that in the U.S. people don't always greet each other by saying "How are You?"—"I'm fine, thank you. And you?"—"Fine, too, thanks." as I had learned through books. Being made a fool of can sometimes also be a good way to learn a language.

Overcoming Accent Problems

Students complain a good deal about the accents of their foreign TAs. For many people, getting rid of an accent is indeed the most difficult thing. There are so many sounds in English, like those of *th* and *z*, which I used to have a lot of trouble pronouncing. Such sounds don't exist in Korean, my native language. When it came to a *th* right after a *z*, it seemed simply impossible. So I asked myself, "*Is this* possible?" I must have repeated this ridiculous question a million times while walking along streets, before I finally decided it *was* possible for me to pronounce those sounds.

Adjusting to American Speech Patterns

One finds that the proverbial doing as the Romans do is not

as easy as it sounds. It requires a lot of effort. It is of course even more difficult if one fails to notice the difference between the Romans' and one's own ways. I had expected such a different world when I first came to this country that I was struck by the similarities rather than the differences between the American way of life and my own country's. But now and then peculiar and interesting things come to my notice. For instance, in Korea we don't usually call others' names unless it is necessary to avoid confusion. But here in America, you may want to say, "Have you finished your homework yet, Tom?" even if there is no one else around besides you and Tom. The efforts the American TAs make to memorize their students' names are impressive, and I think it is indeed worthwhile to remember other people's names.

It would certainly be nice to be able to speak English like a native speaker. At the moment, I am satisfied with being able to say "sure" myself when somebody thanks me. It will take much more practice and imitation on my part to get better, but even if I am never able to speak English flawlessly, I know that things like goodwill, kindness, and willingness to help can offset some of my language handicap.

And moreover, there are some good things about being a non-native speaker: Unlike words in many other languages, English words often have quite unexpected pronunciations, and naturally, when I come across a new word, I tend to pronounce it just as it is spelled, however un-English it may sound. This made a student of mine happy: "Wow, you are the only one around here who could pronounce my name correctly at first sight!"

To Get Rid of an Accent

"Play the ape." Compare your pronunciation with native speakers', and imitate theirs.

Recording your voice and listening to it can be helpful. It may happen, for instance, that people cannot really tell whether you said "merry," "marry," or "Mary," although you think you have pronounced whatever you meant with the correct vowel.

Do not twist your lips and tongue excessively just because you think the sound is exotic enough to deserve such a strain. The outcome is likely to be a strange sound which does not exist in English at all.

Learn your favorite English songs and sing them. In some

languages, most syllables end with a vowel, or some consonants are never used at the end of a syllable. In other languages there are no compound consonants or vowels. If your native language has such features, you may tend unwittingly to insert extra vowels in English words, changing the number of syllables in them, and thus making them sound more natural to you but strange to native English speakers. When you sing, however, you cannot help but stick to the correct number of syllables to fit the words into the melody.

If the pitch is more important in your language than the strength with which a syllable is uttered, it may give your English a conspicuous accent, because you will probably tend to emphasize the stressed syllables with pitch rather than with strength of sound. Analyzing and becoming more aware of the various factors which make up your accent is very important in getting rid of it.

To Improve Listening Comprehension

Listen a lot. It is a good idea to record, say, a radio newscast and listen to the difficult parts of it repeatedly until you can understand them. In my opinion, taking down what you hear and trying to reconstruct the text yourself is more helpful than merely listening to a tape for a text you already have.

It is important to note that quite often words will not retain their original sound values when used in fast speech. Can you tell the difference in the way *the* is pronounced in "want the money," and in "won the money"? How about *is* in "This is mine," and in "This is yours"? More striking is the way "I *want to* study," and "I'm *going to* study" are pronounced. There are hundreds of such examples.

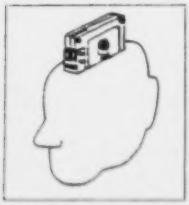
It is very easy to get lost in a fast conversation and find yourself thinking of something else in your own native language. Try not to do that. Try to think in English.

Don't be afraid to ask people to repeat what they have said or to explain to you unfamiliar expressions. After all, you are a non-native speaker; you are not expected to be able to understand everything perfectly.

As soon as you become able to use an expression yourself you will never miss it in other people's speech. Whenever you learn a new expression, therefore, try to use it right away.

How Do Americans Speak?

Bonnie Burns



An ability to identify the phonetic patterns of spoken English is often as important as mastering a comprehensive vocabulary or other formal linguistic techniques. Adopting the stress patterns of native speakers promises to facilitate positive responses from your students. A recognizable tone of voice will encourage students to concentrate on your remarks rather than deciphering what they may feel is a hidden message behind your utterances.

Typical American phonetic patterns and their most common foreign counterparts are best illustrated graphically.

Compare these stress patterns.

American Pronunciation Habits

1. Notice that at all levels, from A to D, there is a big difference between strong and weak syllables (bigger, linguists say, than in any other language).

2. Notice that stresses (what go DO) are the same from A to D. The basic stress pattern is the same at every level of English. But as pronunciation becomes less formal, weak stresses get even weaker: weak vowels change to 2 (B, C), or they drop (C, D).

3. Foreign speakers often make strong syllables too weak and weak syllables too strong and clear (see above). Because of their clear vowels in weak syllables, they sound very formal in English. And when a foreigner is misunderstood, or misunderstands someone, the trouble is usually stress, not sounds.

4. The United States is informal (especially California, *especially* Berkeley). It is uncommon for anyone to speak as formally as in A, except for special clarity (as in talking to foreign speakers) or for dramatic effect. We may believe Americans speak quite clearly (weak vowels clear too), but if we listen carefully to ourselves, we realize we don't.

Informal stress patterns are more common among academic and professional people here than in some other countries. It is common for a doctor or professor to say C or even D. The informal pronunciation has a friendly feeling.

5. C and D are spoken quickly. Quick speech is what made their weak syllables so weak in the first place.

How Do You Want To Speak?

How you learn to speak is a personal choice. You may want to practice all the levels and shift from level to level depending on the situation, like Americans do. If your personal style is informal, or if you will need English for informal situations, C level may suit you. If you are more comfortable with a formal style, or if you will need English for formal situations, maybe you will focus on B level.

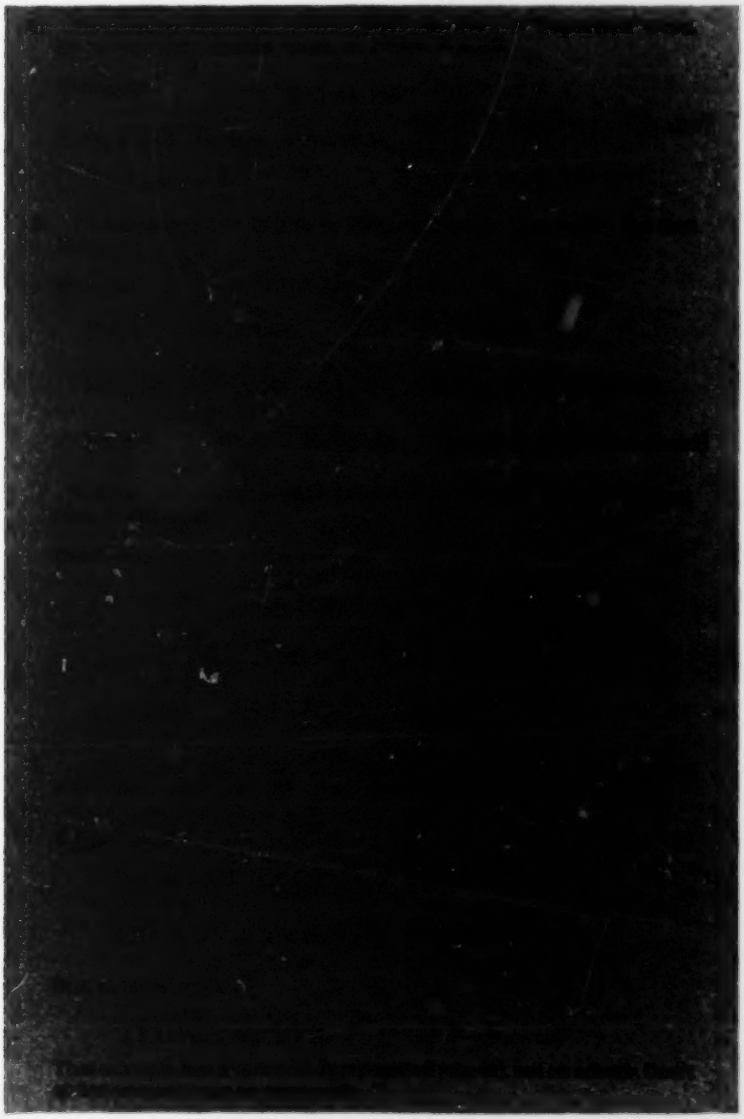
Even if you prefer to cultivate a formal style, it is useful to study the informal. Why?

1. Being able to speak informally helps your listening comprehension.

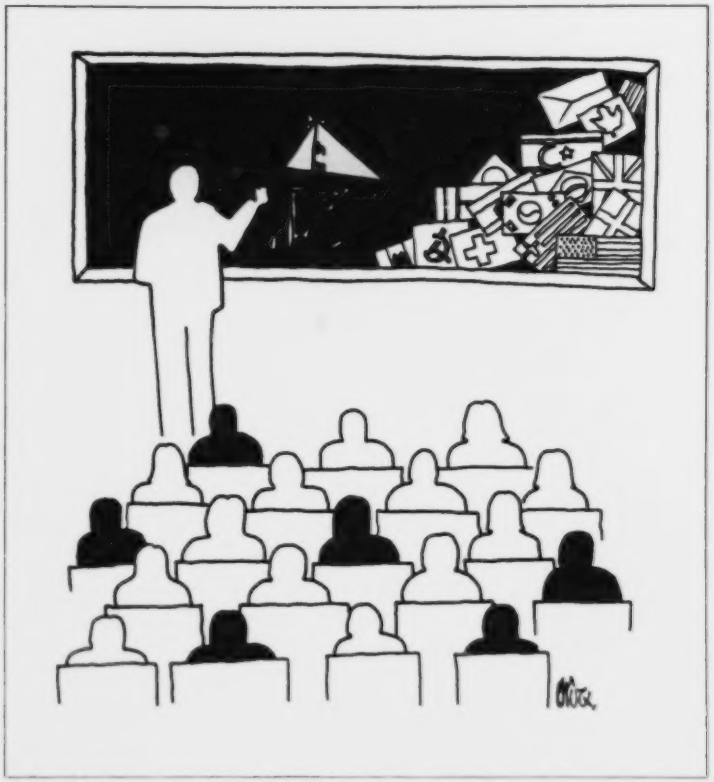
2. Making weak syllables very weak (C,D) helps you stop making them too strong (foreign stress pattern) in formal speech.

Correct Stress: The Big Three

There are exceptions, and special stresses, but these three rules usually work.



Teaching Strategies



Although foreign TAs are usually extremely well grounded in their subject matter, most have no preparation for the pedagogical problems and responsibilities which await them in the classroom. Articles in this section provide vital information on undergraduates' grading expectations and the role of section leaders, as well as a discussion on how to evaluate your teaching performance.

Of course, the problems of the sciences differ from those of the humanities, and tips are presented accordingly. Nevertheless, all articles stress a common theme: the need to recognize and accommodate local educational standards.

Getting to Know the System

Stephen Small

Unless they have had recent personal teaching experience, any students who begin graduate education and undertake responsibilities at U.C. Berkeley as teaching assistants are certain to encounter a range of difficulties which will cause anxiety. For foreign students, especially those without any personal experience in the American educational system, such problems will surely be of greater dimensions. In addition to dealing with the general concerns of all students —housing, finance, registration, and selection of courses— and the particular concerns of all teaching assistants—relations with professors and students, preparation for lectures, and grading papers—they also have to familiarize themselves with both the formal rules and informal operations of the university system. This will usually entail a reassessment of the assumptions, values, and the stock of knowledge that were their strongest assets in their home country. This combination of tasks can often prove overwhelming, even to the strongest of temperaments.

There is a considerable amount of information, support and advice available from various sources which may help to allay tensions and provide the foreign TA with concrete suggestions that can be used in a practical and useful way. In this brief article I identify some of these problems, and in the light of my own experience as a foreign TA in fall 1984, make a number of suggestions for tackling them.

Getting Oriented

What are the kinds of problems that will arise, and what factors will have to be taken into account in dealing with

them? Some will arise even before the course has commenced, and will need to be dealt with in the first weeks of classes; others will rear their heads during the semester and can be dealt with over time. The first set of problems includes meeting and establishing a rapport with the course instructor and students, familiarizing yourself with the university's academic requirements, and getting to know what kinds of resources and support services are available for use by the students following the course.

I had not known that I was going to be a TA until the week that I arrived at Berkeley. I had to attend an interview with the course professor, who was somewhat apprehensive that the stringent academic requirements imposed by British universities might be reflected in my approach to the course. However, the professor turned out to be both flexible and friendly, welcoming suggestions and criticisms and acting on them, and this went a long way toward facilitating an easier entry to the rigors of being a TA. I chose to be frank but polite from the very start; I outlined my own apprehensions and solicited his advice. I found it a distinct advantage to ask as many questions as possible about all aspects of the course, and to put in extra time in those first crucial weeks to offset my lack of familiarity with the system. It may have seemed a little troublesome at first, but it helped clear up exactly what was required by this particular professor in that uncertain area between formal course requirements and the autonomy of the course instructor. I found it most helpful to request copies of previous course outlines, mid-term and final exams and any information sheets that had been handed out.

Using Instructional Resources

To familiarize myself with the academic system I drew extensively upon the information available in all areas. This included the general catalogue, departmental information sheets, the library staff, and booklets provided by the Advisers to Foreign Students and Scholars and the Graduate Assembly. The GA's handbook *Learning to Teach* was an invaluable asset, for it provided comprehensive information about dealing with day-to-day issues that TAs confront. Some resources I stumbled upon by chance: for example, the Student Learning Center.

Avoiding Accent Problems

After these first hurdles my greatest obstacle was coping

with the first lecture. The course had an average attendance of about forty-five, and I had no fellow TAs with whom to share my anxieties. One issue was my strong British regional accent, which posed a few comprehension problems for some students and was certain to cause jocularity. This made me self-conscious. To overcome this there seemed few options but to plunge in. I got some of the students attuned to my accent by arriving at the class early and initiating a conversation with a group of about fifteen. This strategy worked quite well. A fair number of the class got to hear my accent before I spoke in front of the whole class, and, while some found the accent amusing, there were no major problems.

Relating to Students

The second area of problems may have less initial impact but is sure to pose practical difficulties over the duration of the course: maintaining good and friendly relations with the students and coordinating one's own work both as a graduate student and TA. In my first role as TA, I wanted to be as friendly and helpful as possible by showing an interest in students' work and discussing a range of issues outside academia. Students identified with me more as a friend than as a TA, or so it seemed. It became clear that some students welcomed favorable treatment. This made it difficult to grade papers as objectively as possible while maintaining good relations. These problems seemed to be compounded with regard to some athletes. There are numerous conflicts between their academic and sports timetables and the latter invariably take priority. I found it necessary to make as clear as possible from the start my responsibilities and obligations as a TA.

Clarifying Standards

One common concern expressed by students throughout the duration of the course was the points to be awarded to take-home papers and in-class exams, as well as the standards for written work generally. Despite being provided with a course outline detailing these issues, students regularly requested clarification and discussion. This was often their way of emphasizing their interest in achieving good grades. My own response was to remind them to check their course outlines

for the information, and to take the opportunity to discuss general issues and problems.

It was less easy to deal with the issue of standards for written work. When the first take-home exam was handed out, I outlined some of the factors that contribute to good written work and stated some of the characteristics required for a good essay. I attempted to make things clearer by organizing special discussion groups to outline writing strategies and make suggestions about essay structure. Many students welcomed this opportunity to get a greater insight into my own expectations, and they clearly benefited from it. But to be sure, alongside all the other tasks, it was very time-consuming work.

Finding an Equilibrium

In addition to these efforts, I spent a considerable amount of time grading the first take-home essays, identifying particular difficulties and encouraging students to come and discuss these with me. There is no blueprint for maintaining an equilibrium between fulfilling your TA role and handling your own personal academic workload. But again, by being aware of the inevitable conflict from the start, the TA is better prepared to deal with it.

Teaching demands a calm temperament and a strong frame of mind in order to cope with the large volume of work and retain composure for one's own studies. TAs survive only by learning to juggle 25 balls simultaneously. While success does depend a great deal on one's own personality, a considerable strain is taken off one's shoulders by drawing extensively on the resources available. Succeeding as a TA is a fulfilling and gratifying experience which is sure to serve you in good stead. And our contribution cannot be understated, for we are a valuable and resourceful pool of talent.

Summary

- Spend time as early as possible familiarizing yourself with all the course's formal requirements.
- Get the instructor to be as explicit as possible about his or her own particular requirements.
- Be fair but firm with the students. Encourage them to discuss their concerns with you, as well as their interests outside the class.

Teaching Strategies

- Comment clearly and in some detail on the points system being used and on standards for written work and class discussions.
- Try to design a sensible work schedule that will prepare you to balance the heavy and at times conflicting demands between teaching undergraduates and doing your own graduate course work.

How to Teach Without Talking

Eyal Naveh

Most foreign TAs encounter many language problems in their first teaching experience. They struggle with English and sometimes it limits their ability to teach clearly and effectively. Certainly, there is no way to avoid the English language as the main means of communicating with students. However, there are some techniques which can help to diminish excessive talking on the part of the TA while increasing active student participation. In the humanities and social sciences, the main purpose of small discussion groups is to encourage critical thinking by emphasizing active student participation. Yet many times this purpose is missed, and the discussion session ends up as another lecture directed by the TA to a small passive audience. TAs usually open the discussion by posing a general question to which they know (or think they know) the answer. Few students venture to find the answer. They usually miss the exact explanation the teacher had in mind, and then the instructor gives a long speech, explaining his or her own approach to the question, and raises another question. The TA thus "discusses" most issues with silent students.

In the humanities and social sciences the teachers can often avoid such an approach if they accept *a priori* the fact that there is not always a correct answer or right information. We can embark upon a new way of guiding the discussion by encouraging students to search for various answers and then to engage in a discussion, even a debate, to defend their arguments. Although students leave the discussion session without one right answer, they rarely need it in the

humanities and social sciences. They have already heard one approach from the professor in the lecture. They normally read another answer in the book, and do not need another authority. It is better in class discussions to create a learning atmosphere that will lead the student to develop an independent argument and then to defend it in a debate or discussion with classmates.

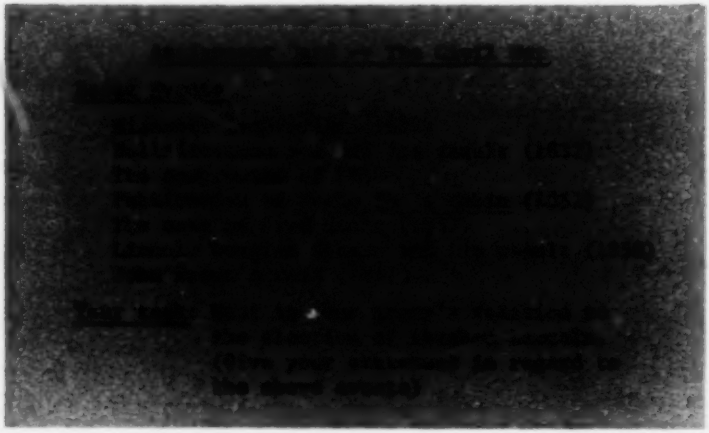
Increasing Student Participation

One way to create such a learning atmosphere, which will make students more susceptible to active debate, is by a "simulation role-game." Such a game in the field of history transforms students to real participants in the historical situation. It is the TA's responsibility to create the structure for the simulation games and to determine first the learning target of such a game, and then how to approach such a target in class. It requires a lot of preparation before the class begins, but if it is well structured, the results are beneficial to both the students and the teacher. The students participate in most of the discussion and the teacher does not become exhausted by talking excessively.

Breaking into Small Groups

I applied such a method of learning whenever we reached a very controversial period in American history. The students represented diverse interest groups and tried to produce documents from the viewpoint of their group. When the subject was the causes of the American Civil War, I divided the class into five such groups. Each group included three to five students and represented an active interest group that existed on the eve of the war: 1) Republican politicians in the North 2) Abolitionists from New England 3) Southern slaveholders 4) Non-slaveholders from the southern states who traditionally voted for the Democrats 5) Free blacks in the northern states. All students had already read basic information about the causes of the Civil War and were familiar with certain "answers." Nevertheless, I urged them to react only to their specific situation in the game. Each group received the same information in an assignment card that included main events in the sectional conflict up to the election of Abraham Lincoln in November 1860. After reading the information, each group had to write down and explain its reaction to the election of Lincoln. Students were basically familiar with the information and they had the textbook to

refresh their memory. The following card was the exact task card that each group received:



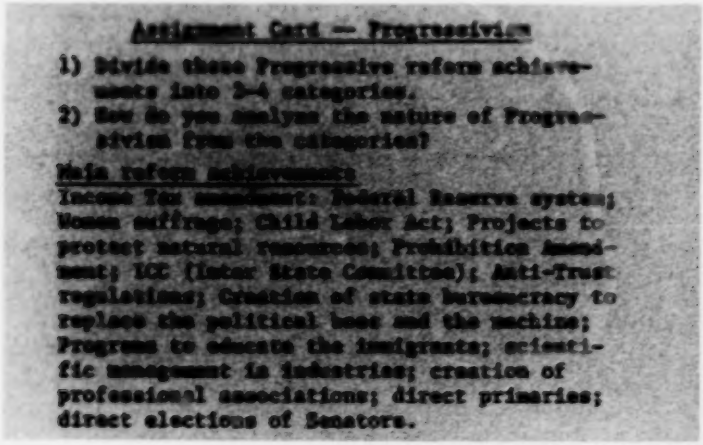
Debating as a Teaching Tool

Each group had to present a well-argued statement from its pre-assigned point of view. Students had thirty minutes to phrase a statement, and I was available for any questions that they had. After the groups formulated their statements, they read them and wrote them on the blackboard. They then began a debate, challenging each other and defending their own views. I urged them to remain sympathetic to their roles in the game, so they were not "afraid" to express their opinions and to challenge each other with provocative arguments.

In that case such an approach helped to demonstrate the acute sense of crisis in the society at that time, and the breakdown of all mechanisms of compromise. In fact this was the main learning target of this particular lesson. Through their structured group assignment and debate the students reached this target and at the end everyone understood that the device of compromise that had kept the Union together until 1860 simply could not function anymore.

Not every question in American history can be transformed into a conflict between participants. Yet there are other devices to encourage analytical activities from the students with minimal talking from the TA. For example, how can we

understand the Progressive movement in America? Teachers can explain the Progressive reform actions in class, but they might end with a long and complex speech about the various reformers, their diverse achievements, and their very heterogeneous and sometimes contradictory ideology. It is certainly better for foreign TAs to let the students reach (or challenge) such conclusions themselves. When teaching the Progressive movement, I divided the class into small groups so each student could have an opportunity to discuss the subject with some others. However, in this case the task can be done also as an individual learning assignment.



Assignment Card — Progressivism

1) Divide these Progressive reform achievements into 3-4 categories.
2) How do you analyze the nature of Progressivism from the categories?

Main reform achievements:
Income Tax amendment; Federal Reserve system; Women suffrage; Child Labor Act; Projects to protect natural resources; Prohibition Amendment; ICC (Inter State Committee); Anti-Trust regulations; Creation of state bureaucracy to replace the political boss and the machine; Programs to educate the immigrants; scientific management in industries; creation of professional associations; direct primaries; direct elections of Senators.

Learning Targets

The learning target was to emphasize the diversity of the reforms. Initially I chose different reform actions. It was a hard task to put them in any logical order, and different groups reached different categorizations, from a simple dichotomy of "forward-oriented"/"backward-oriented" reforms to interesting categorizations like "moralistic reforms," "efficiency-oriented reforms" and "reforms to restore competition and equality." Although students struggled to organize information according to abstract categories, they found it helpful since it forced them to think analytically and not just to absorb the teacher's analysis.

There is a way to give students the categories in the assignment rather than the concrete information. In that way they need to collect the information from the textbook, and to

organize it in categories. It is an easier task for the students, though they are forced to use the teacher's categories. I applied such a method when we discussed the New Deal. I distributed my categories to each student according to the following example:

Assignment Card -- The New Deal

Organize the main measures of the New Deal in the following table:

	1st N.D. 1933-1935	2nd N.D. 1935-36
relief		
recovery		
reform		
revolution (?)		

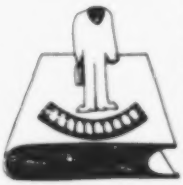
These teaching methods that I used in history classes are not intended to replace conventional class discussion. They served me well as a foreign TA and helped to create a more active learning atmosphere, while lessening my language burden by reducing the amount of talking I had to do in class. I suggest using them selectively in relation to the topics of a specific class. These teaching exercises require some work in advance, but they serve to reduce the TA's burden by placing more responsibility for class discussions on the students—encouraging them to think for themselves and play a more active role in the learning process.

Summary

- Have a clear learning target in mind, but encourage students to search for their own answers.
- Organize activities such as role-simulation games to generate active student participation.
- Divide class into small groups to spark discussion and debate.

Leading Sections in the Sciences

Rajesh Gupta



In contrast to our colleagues in the Humanities and the Social Sciences, the TA in the Sciences has the advantage of working and conversing in the universal language of numbers and equations. Since vocabulary is limited in the Sciences, basic teaching skills are of extreme importance in opening up the lines of communication between you and your students. Of course, language and cultural divergencies often pose a problem, but first and foremost the foreign TA must make judicious use of fundamental teaching props.

Preparation and Classroom Props

Skillful use of the blackboard is crucial. Neat, legible and pre-planned use of the board will endow your students with a sense of direction, while keeping you from straying to issues that do not warrant discussion with the entire section. If you have planned the section well, you should be able to anticipate all the major issues to be discussed. These problems should be set out on the blackboard before section begins. There is nothing more disheartening than attempting to write on the blackboard while carrying out a conversation in a foreign language. Among other things, it is important that throughout the lesson you be in constant touch with the students rather than the board—another reason for preparing handouts or writing up issues on the board before class.

Anticipating problems is the key to all good teaching, irrespective of language or nationality. If you have not taught American undergraduates before, you should seek guidance from the course instructor. Some instructors are happy to

deliver their lectures and leave the rest to their TAs. Thus, TAs have to bear most of the brunt of the course. In this case you should establish a good working relationship with a veteran TA, preferably one who is sensitive to the problems you may be encountering.

Language Barriers

Language is an issue that needs to be addressed. Even though your command of English may be excellent, chances are that at least some problems will pop up when conversing with your students. Your accent may pose difficulties; your students may fail to appreciate your system of emphasizing points, or they might take supposedly humorous points seriously (what can be worse than that!). The situation is complicated by the fact that in a discussion section many students shy away from pointing out the ambiguous issues. Therefore, you need to make an effort to encourage them to express whatever might be bothering them.

Advise your students to speak clearly, and constantly probe to see if they are following your train of thought. If you are consistent and friendly, you will find that many hesitant students will build up the courage to ask questions. Try not to ignore any unclear sentences that you may utter, even though you may consider it insignificant to repeat yourself. Any incomprehension on the part of the students tends to distract even the most serious students. Listen carefully to your students, because ignored students lose interest very fast. Pay attention to facial expressions. Blank expressions mean that you need to repeat whatever you're saying, preferably in different words.

Cultural Issues

Foreign TAs will also encounter some cultural obstacles. Indeed, many of us who have just arrived in this country experience a state of cultural disorientation. Not being part of the student body is one of the problems encountered by the foreign graduate student. This personal aspect eventually affects teaching abilities, too. Some of the foreign TAs tend to feel so separated from their students that they are unaware of the general level of the class. It is best to take active interest not only in the subject matter that you are teaching, but also in the background and interests of your students. It is important to keep in mind that a typical class consists of students with a variety of backgrounds. Most foreign TAs are

surprised by the wide variety of knowledge—or ignorance—that exists in a large and prestigious school such as Berkeley. Not all students can be expected to have the same level of understanding.

Often it is good practice to ask your students to write on a slip of paper the relevant courses they have already taken. You might also want to get to know their interests outside of the classroom (sports, movies, etc.) so as to improve the general rapport.

Another cultural mismatch is the level of informality expected in the classroom. Many foreign students find themselves at a loss about how formal the classroom atmosphere should be. A friendly, easy-going atmosphere is definitely helpful. However, caution is advised. Some of the students, though not very formal, are shy. Watch out, or else you might be in for a "cold shoulder" should you extend your "informality" too far. It is best to be serious without being stuffy and to work on gradually getting to know your students better.

You should expect that some of the students, being aware of your fleeting acquaintance with the American college system, will attempt to persuade you to do the work that they are supposed to grapple with alone. Make sure that you do not spend the section solving individual problems that are an integral part of the student's homework. Instead, spend as much time as possible suggesting methods for problem solving.

Leading sections at Berkeley is definitely rewarding. With a little caution, a lot of common sense, and much preparation, you will probably enjoy the interaction with your students at a time when you find yourself in the difficult situation of being far from home, in a strange society.

Summary

- Skillful use of the blackboard and other teaching props will eliminate many potential misunderstandings.
- Language barriers may be overcome if you try to anticipate likely questions and prepare answers beforehand.
- Get to know your students as early as possible, particularly their academic backgrounds.
- Learn to adapt the informal yet firm attitude expected from TAs at Berkeley.

Grading Humanities Students

Eyal Naveh

One of the most frustrating moments for any TA is to be confronted by a student who demands to know why she/he received only a B-plus and not an A-minus in the course. The frustration is even greater among foreign TAs who have probably never experienced such a reaction in their home countries and never dared to question their own grades when they were undergraduates. If TAs have never used letter grades before, since in their countries the grades were written in percentages, it might be very difficult for them to explain to the student the computation of a B-plus grade.

In order to deal effectively with such a student, TAs must be able to give concrete and detailed explanations of the grades. Foreign TAs in particular must familiarize themselves with grades and evaluations on three basic levels:

1) A mental adaptation to the enormous significance American students give to grades.

2) Technical acquaintance with the letter grades and their meaning in terms of evaluation.

3) Substantive knowledge of measurement and evaluation of papers, exams and class participation.

The first two realms are of particular interest for a foreign TA, while the last is a common requirement for any responsible teacher.

Dealing with Grade-Conscious Students

Like anybody in the world, the American student wants a good grade. But judging from my own experience, as well as from my discussions with other foreign TAs, an emphasis on

achievement as reflected by the grade is the prime concern of students. Grades are the most essential component for many students, much more than their interest in the course or the essence of the material. Perhaps because American undergraduates are very young and most of them have never experienced another challenge in their lives beside grades, they tend to become obsessed with this issue. Perhaps it derives from the very competitive and achievement-oriented nature of American culture. Whatever the cause, the foreign TA as a teacher needs to be aware of the high emphasis Americans put on grades. Answers like "What, after all, is the difference between an A-minus and a B-plus"; "You have in general a nice grade" or "Grades are not that important for a happy life" will not appease an angry student. By avoiding such answers—which might be acceptable in another place in the world—foreign TAs demonstrate that they also take the grading procedure seriously. Grading is part of the course, a very important one to the student, and it should have importance for the teacher as well.

Understanding the Grading System

Because of the emphasis placed on grades, foreign TAs need first and foremost to know the meaning of the grade that they have assigned. A simple way is to ask an American colleague "What is the verbal equivalent to A, B, C, and D? What really is the difference between A-minus and B-plus? It is useful sometimes to translate the grade into percentages. It is very important to solve the mystical meaning of letters such as P or NP before starting to teach and grade. In general, it helps if the TA writes down the meaning of the letters: A—Very good. B—Good. C—Average. D—Bad but still passing. F—Failing. The plus and the minus are only additional marks for further specification. Thus an A-minus is a very good paper with minor corrections, while a B-plus is only a good paper with some interesting ideas or arguments.

In science the distinction between "good" and "very good" seems more accurate and measurable. In the Humanities and Social Sciences it is less so. Nevertheless, even in these fields the teacher must establish criteria for evaluation and inform the students in the first meeting about the grading policy. I used to stress in my various classes that an A paper or exam is

an *original* work. I expected students to show their own knowledge of the material discussed in the lectures and discussion group, as well as in the required bibliography. Such a comprehensive understanding of the learning material entitled them to a good grade, i.e. to a B. If they expressed something new, original and certainly logical and intelligent *besides* their knowledge, then they had potential for an A grade. If they demonstrated only a partial knowledge —showing understanding of lectures and class discussion without incorporation of the required bibliography—then they probably would get a C grade. If even this partial knowledge was incomplete, then they would receive a D. Less than that deserved an F. Reading anonymous papers of different grades is helpful.

Explaining Your Grades

When evaluating a written work it is essential to give detailed comments all along the paper to clarify the grade for the student. Many foreign TAs never experienced such detailed evaluations when they wrote undergraduate papers and exams, but in the United States extensive comments seem very important. It is useful if the TA can evaluate and react to every paragraph and then summarize the reactions in a written comprehensive evaluation at the end of the work. The remarks need to be "operative" rather than general. "This is good," or "This is bad" is not an advised remark. A specific comment explaining why this is good or bad is much more useful.

Finally, most TAs lead discussion sessions and should evaluate participation in the class and incorporate it into the final grade. By being very open with their grading policy, and explaining the relative weight of any component of the grade, teachers provide the students with a better perspective on the evaluation process during various stages of the course. Sometimes specific quizzes with multiple choice answers help in determining grades—even in the humanities and social sciences. The most important thing to do is to state a grading policy from the beginning, thereby reducing uncertainties and surprises.

So if a student asks you to explain why she/he got a B-plus and not an A-minus, you will have a very detailed and concrete answer. Showing the various components of the grade and explaining particular grades according to the comments in written papers will help to provide such a

student with serious and responsible answers. It may not convince the student, who naturally wants a better grade, but it will enable the TA to clarify the grade in concrete and detailed terms, which is important for good and responsible teaching.

Summary

- Take into account the sometimes obsessive grade-consciousness of American students when you discuss your grading procedure with them.
- Establish in you own mind the meaning of each grade—A, B, C, D and F—and tell your students what your criteria are.
- Write detailed comments explaining what specifically is good or bad about a student's paper.

Grading Options in the Sciences

Prabhakar Raghavan

The diversity of the educational backgrounds of Berkeley TAs makes grading and evaluation a complex matter. It is necessary to recognize two sources of disparity between the attitudes of Berkeley undergraduates and foreign TAs: On the one hand, the methods and objectives of the evaluation process observed by foreign TAs in their undergraduate careers are often quite different from the ones used here; on the other hand, the importance assigned by students to grades varies from one system of education to another.

Teaching assistants educated abroad may tend to emphasize the skills that were important to them in their own undergraduate careers; as a result, they may develop schemes of evaluation (question types on quizzes, the assignment of points to the different concepts involved in a problem, etc.) which are too rigorous or in other ways inappropriate for Berkeley students. TAs from abroad are at first likely to consider Berkeley undergraduates to be obsessed with grades.

The Evaluation Process

Evaluation is an integral part of the educational process. This includes (a) evaluating the performances of the students in a class, and (b) determining the quality and effect of the instructional process. Teaching assistants at Berkeley are (to a large extent) fortunate to have readers to cater to the more mundane aspects of grading; many TAs have to grade only tests and examinations. In addition, TAs in the sciences and engineering do not, in general, have to face the task of grading "essay-type" questions and evaluating subjective matter. The

problem-oriented nature of our disciplines lends a certain degree of objectivity to the evaluation process. On the one hand it simplifies the task of assigning points to a student's work. However, it also makes the process susceptible to over-simplification. For example, getting the right numbers at the end of a series of computations often becomes the criterion for deciding the merit of students' work. In all fairness to the students, it is important for a TA to understand the process of grading.

A Feedback Process

Ideally, grades are a feedback mechanism that tells students where they went wrong and what they can do to correct it. The realities of the world we live in, unfortunately, make it more important for a student to attain some index of performance—a certain grade or score perhaps. It is easy to deplore this, but one must recognize the pressure to which the average student is subjected. (This is not too hard considering that we have ourselves been students for a considerable period.) Grades often become an end in themselves, with an understanding of the subject relegated to second position. (*"But will it be in the exam?"*).

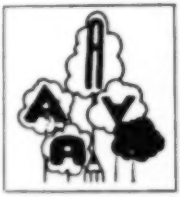
Such tendencies are at times engendered by poor grading. An evaluator whose grading is cryptic and terse is likely to enhance the obsession with grades. When the student merely sees a red circle around the final answer and a score on the problem, the only reaction that is evoked is a renewed determination to get a "better grade." On the other hand, a TA who takes the time to pinpoint the error(s) in a student's answer is actually initiating a correction mechanism that could result in the student understanding the content of the course better. Writers of computer programs are asked to comment on their code to make it "readable"; students solving problems are asked to develop their solution clearly. Is it too much, then, to ask that a TA grade solutions in a logical and comprehensible manner?

A final caution on this notion of "good" grading. When explaining where a student went wrong, be sure not to be patronizing or sarcastic. Students have feelings, too; most of them are trying quite hard. Try not to use words like "obviously" in pointing out an error; there is nothing to be gained by making a student feel inadequate or foolish. Don't be too hard on students who are a little untidy (*"How do you*

*expect me to read this *&#© ?"*); you're supposed to look more for substance than for form.

The other main outcome of the grading process is an evaluation of your teaching. It is usually extremely interesting (and instructive) to try to analyze the process by which a student arrived at some wrong answer. Any misconceptions in students' minds (generated by lectures and discussions) quickly come to light. In this respect there is room for some intelligent question design.

Designing Questions for Gradability



It is possible to design questions in such a manner as to derive some information from them about the students' grasp of the concepts involved. There is another reason to design questions well: let's look at an instance of bad question design I used in my first year as TA.

The instructor had asked me to contribute one question to the final examination. When I showed him my question, he was enthused about the manner in which it seemed to test all the concepts arising in the course we had taught. When the solutions came in, we soon realized our folly. Grading the problem consisted (in part) of checking the entries in a 11 x 32 matrix of ones and zeros—if you've never done that, try it sometime. To make matters worse, we soon realized that the correct solution was not unique—there were four possible combinations of zeros and ones! Needless to say, that was one of the problems the instructor asked me to grade.

There is thus some need to be careful to design questions that can be graded efficiently, leaving you free to offer appropriate critical comments. A second lesson to be learned from the above is that you should always formulate a solution to a problem before unleashing it on the students. In doing so, you have a chance to spot any ambiguities in the problem statement, and to foresee the typical errors that might arise in students' solutions.

Resolving Complaints

Given that most students find it necessary to receive "good grades," you'll find many cases when a student is discontented with the grades you assign. The first thing to realize in this respect is that you *can* make amends. Even if you believe the error is not yours, it's still worth looking at the student's

answer and seeing if you've been too harsh in your evaluation. If you believe that you've given the student a fair deal, then you have to hold your own. Do not succumb to a student's arguments to the effect that despite his/her wrong answer, you still ought to give more points ("*...but I really think I deserve more than that.*") Don't delude yourself by thinking that if you yield to students' demands you can ingratiate yourself with them and thus attain a reputation as a "good TA." In such cases, refer the student to the instructor and save your breath.

Quite often, in the course of grading, instances of plagiarism come to light. There really isn't much to be said here on this subject. Plagiarism is certainly wrong, but it is up to you to decide whether the occasion warrants more than a warning to the student(s) involved. In really serious instances, you should simply report it and let the instructor decide on the course of action; instructors have a lot more experience in the business than you do.

As a foreign TA, you will have to be especially cautious in your grading. Student expectations and attitudes towards grades need to be understood, as they probably differ from the standards in your home country.

Above all, remember that the essence of the grading process is to understand the students' comprehension of the subject. Doing so requires sensitivity to the students' aspirations and endeavors.

Summary

- Take into account that different cultural backgrounds affect the way that both foreign TAs and Berkeley students perceive the grading process.
- Don't let the fact that grading in the sciences is largely objective lull you into oversimplifying your evaluations.
- Try to see how a student arrives at an answer, not just whether it is right or wrong.
- Use your grading as a feedback mechanism to help students realize what they do not understand about the material.
- Design questions that will help you evaluate how well students grasp the concepts you are teaching, and work through possible solutions yourself.
- Try to deal with complaints fairly, from both your own and the student's point of view.

Student Evaluations of TAs

Ron Robin

Most departments at Berkeley require student evaluations of their TAs at the end of the semester. Although these evaluations provide an important tool for improving the quality of teaching, they also pose a problem. Because the questionnaires come at the end of the course, students often pay little attention to them, since the students cannot benefit directly from their comments. Many evaluations are less than candid. Those who are pleased with their grade will often heap effusive and indiscriminate praise upon the instructor. Students with less than perfect performances are liable to blame their deficiencies on the TA.

In the case of the foreign TA this problem is compounded. Studies have shown that complaints about foreign TAs—particularly concerning language difficulties and accent problems—often come from students who are dissatisfied with their final grades. On the other hand, the competent students feel that it is "unfair" to criticize small matters, such as the TA's unawareness of American college etiquette, if their overall evaluation was satisfactory.

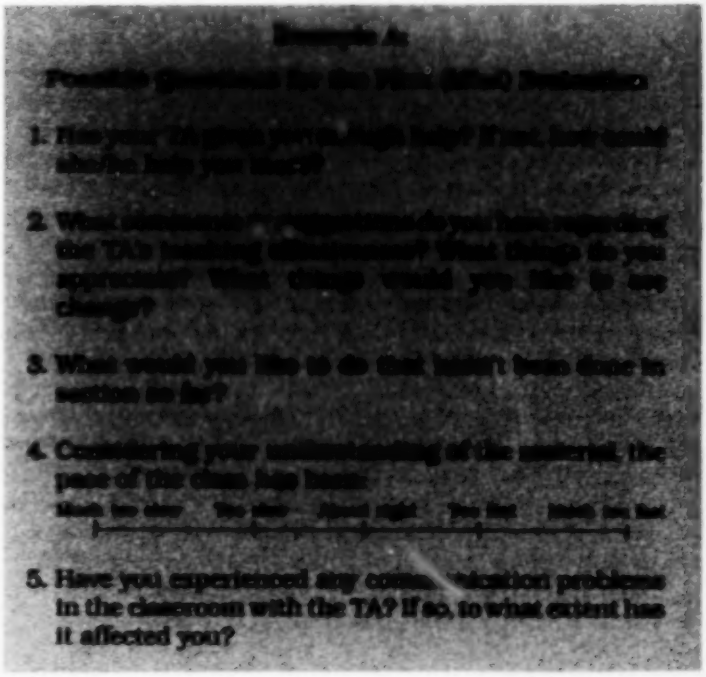
Under these circumstances, foreign TAs should use some form of mid-term evaluation to ensure satisfactory feedback from their students. Knowing that the rest of the course might change for the better through constructive criticism, students often furnish many helpful observations and suggestions.

Using Mid-Term TA Evaluations

Mid-term evaluations may take many forms. You may

conduct them orally if you are so inclined. Sometime after the first three or four weeks of class, you could set aside fifteen minutes for an open discussion. You should realize, however, that students prefer anonymity when criticizing the person who wields the power of grading.

A more efficient means of assessing student sentiment is to hand out blank 3x5 cards sometime around midterm. Ask your students to write down the positive aspects of the course on one side of the card, and their criticisms on the other. Although this is a simple and often effective tool for receiving feedback, you will find that most undergraduates prefer answering specific questions. Two possible forms for conducting a more focused evaluation, courtesy of the Offices of Educational Development and English as a Second Language, are reprinted below.



Example A is a model for a short mini-evaluation. You will

notice that only question 5 addresses the language problem, and in a deliberately vague form. Thus, rather than putting words in their mouths, your students are left with the task of pinpointing the exact nature of the problem.

Example B (see next page) is considerably longer, but it does away with the burden of phrasing answers through the use of a numerical scale for each question. Students who are fearful that the anonymity of their criticism might be compromised if their TA recognizes their handwriting might prefer this format. Once again, the language is not addressed directly, but questions 20 and 22 give ample opportunity to address this aspect if indeed students are concerned or cannot understand your English.

While all the evaluation methods suggested here would probably apply to every department, you should adapt the questions to the particular aspects of your discipline and classroom setting. Stress that student evaluations should be candid and anonymous. So as not to compromise this important aspect, bury your head in a newspaper, or even leave the classroom when students are filling out the forms.

Example B:

Student Description of Teaching Assistants

To help the TA evaluate his or her teaching, please fill out the following description as carefully and as thoughtfully as possible. Thank you.

Please circle the number which indicates the degree to which you feel each item is descriptive of the TA.

In general your TA:

Not at all Descriptive				Very Descriptive	
1	2	3	4	5	1. Knows if the class is understanding him/her.
1	2	3	4	5	2. Makes you feel free to ask questions or express ideas.
1	2	3	4	5	3. Is helpful and supportive when you are having difficulty.
1	2	3	4	5	4. Helps clarify points not understood in lecture.
1	2	3	4	5	5. Uses class time effectively.
1	2	3	4	5	6. Explains new material clearly.
1	2	3	4	5	7. Is enthusiastic about the subject.
1	2	3	4	5	8. Is thoughtful and precise in answering questions.
1	2	3	4	5	9. Has clear objectives for each class session.
1	2	3	4	5	10. Raises challenging questions or problems for discussion.
1	2	3	4	5	11. Is available to students outside of class.
1	2	3	4	5	12. Seems well prepared.
1	2	3	4	5	13. Appears to have a good knowledge of the subject matter.

1	2	3	4	5	14. Provides useful feedback on assignments.
1	2	3	4	5	15. Is concerned that students learn from the material.
1	2	3	4	5	16. Presents clear summaries or reviews of material covered.

17. Considering my understanding of the material, the pace of the section has been:
Much too slow Too slow About right Too fast Much too fast

18. Considering how the professor structured the course, the material presented in section has been:
Poorly chosen Partially useful Satisfactory Good Excellent

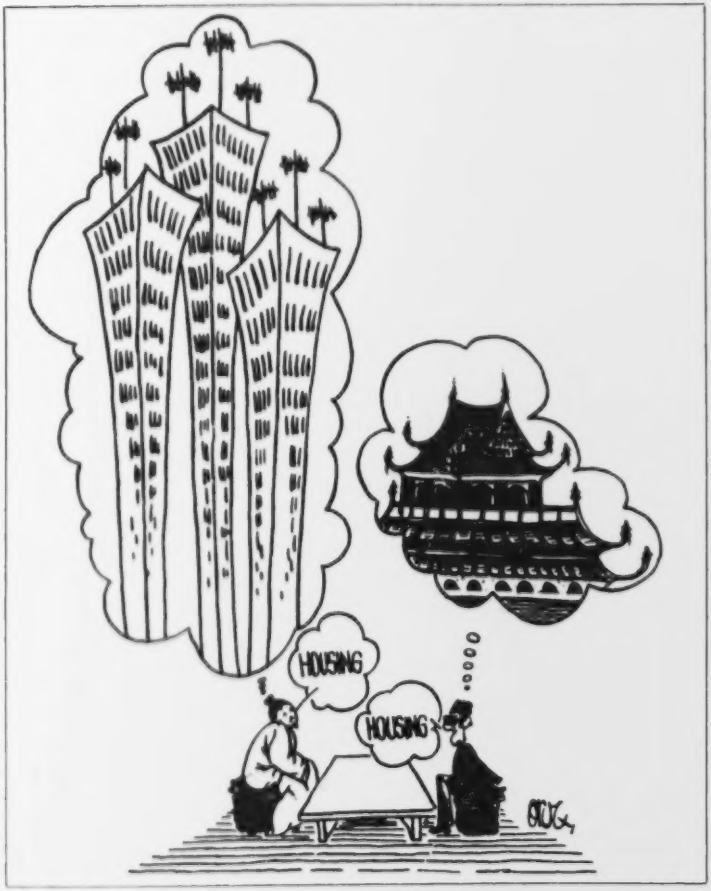
19. Considering both the limitations and possibilities of the subject matter and course, how would you rate the overall teaching effectiveness of this teaching assistant.
Not at all effective Somewhat effective Moderately effective Effective Extremely effective

20. What comments or suggestions do you have regarding your instructor's teaching effectiveness?

21. What aspects of the course did you find most useful?

22. Please comment on any improvement that you have noticed in the TA's use of English or in the TA's teaching. What communication or teaching difficulties remain?

Cultural Issues



The basis for a good working relationship between foreign TAs and their students is mutual understanding. Like their American counterparts, foreign TAs need to establish a comfortable learning atmosphere based on mutual respect. By identifying the cultural barriers that may divide foreign TAs from their students and offering advice on how to overcome these obstacles, this section should help you learn how to create a fertile learning environment.

Foreign TAs from the Undergraduate Perspective

David Pickell

Although most undergraduates have grumbled to friends about a teaching assistant with an accent so thick that it makes a difficult subject almost impenetrable, and others with more of a sense of humor have joked about a non-native TA's language gaffe ("He was talking about problem sets and we all thought he said problem sex!"), in general undergraduates at U.C. Berkeley find that foreign TAs add a welcome dash of spice to their undergraduate experience.

The most positive undergraduate response to foreign TAs comes from students in international disciplines, such as Latin American studies, comparative literature and geography. As one student of agricultural economy said, foreign TAs can speak not only from knowledge but also from experience on foreign political and cultural questions. "The foreign TAs that I've had would use examples that were real, and were lived," she said. "They brought a breadth and a wealth of knowledge that American TAs don't have, or have gotten only from books."

One student studying organization theory, in particular comparing bureaucracies in different countries, found the course especially rewarding because it was taught by a French TA:

"Having been born and raised in Paris, and even having worked for a year pushing papers in the French bureaucracy, the TA was able to paint a vivid picture—complete with descriptions of the standard two and a half hour lunches and

job security guarantees that make the civil service here look like a temp help agency—of the notoriously moribund French system."

Communication Problems

Not all undergraduates, however, found being in a class with a foreign instructor such a rosy learning situation. Many complained, sometimes bitterly, of an instructor's difficulty with English:

"This guy was teaching Hegel. He was reading the Italian translation, which he would have to translate again into English. And his English was so horrible he would have to pause, trying to stammer out the last word of a sentence while people in the class shouted suggestions. When he heard the right word he picked it up and kept going. Needless to say, the fine points of Hegel's theory got lost somewhere in all this. It was a nightmare."

Another student found his TA's accent intelligible, and his grasp of English satisfactory, during the lecture, but when points were brought up during discussion, he would be lost.

"Precisely when you got to a very complicated counterpoint, that was when the communication would break down because he didn't understand English well enough."

But what many students found distracting was not an instructor's accent, or failure to grasp the rudiments of the King's grammar (a rare occurrence according to most undergraduates), but rather the formality of a foreign TA's use of the language. Students often depend on their TA to translate the staid and effete academic tomes they have been assigned to read into street language and American idioms that make the intellectual content of the readings accessible.

One undergraduate commented, "In this (philosophy) class, I missed the quick kind of pedestrian examples my American TAs could give. She couldn't argue a philosophical point with a McDonald's hamburger, and I've had American TAs who could."

Idiom and American slang are things that a TA can learn only by living in this country. But foreign TAs' "highbrow" use of language was mentioned by undergraduates in connection with a perceived attitude on the part of foreign TAs to define the student/teacher relationship more sharply than many would have liked.

The TA-Student Relationship

For undergraduates, TAs serve to personalize the large institution in which students can quickly seem to represent no more than numbers on computer sheets. Students have said they find classes taught by TAs more rewarding than those the professor teaches because the TA—younger, less established and perhaps less jaded than a professor—is not as threatening a figure. The authority that shrouds a professor, whether intentional or not, can present a roadblock to participation and hands-on learning. Awe and other strange forms of academic hero-worship do not as often dampen discussion in classes led by TAs.

Undergraduates were put off by TAs—and many said this was more common among foreign TAs—who were excessively formal, who were uncomfortable being called by their first names or who keep office-hour discussions strictly to the academic topic at hand. One student in the sciences complained that her foreign TAs were less jocular, "less willing to put their feet up on the table during office hours." She added, however, that these same TAs were very strict about keeping regular office hours, in contrast to their more casual peers, who would say "just make an appointment," or "just give me a call."

Although most undergraduates objected to the formality of foreign TAs, one student said going to the office of her TA, who was from India, was a memorable taste of very non-Occidental sensibilities.

"He would always treat us as if we were walking into his house. He would offer us tea, and he was always scrupulously polite. He was very formal, but that is the custom. As an American, it seemed a little pretentious. I felt like I was being treated like royalty. But to him it was a sincere show of friendship."

The Problem of TA Intolerance

Another undergraduate told a story of a TA from Tunisia whose educational experience did not prepare him for the intellectual irreverence of American undergraduates. According to the student, the TA insisted on one interpretation of the material (and to this particular student, at least, not a very interesting one) and interpreted any student's questioning of

his approach as a personal attack on his authority. At one point, the student said, the TA stormed from the room after misinterpreting a question as an insult.

"At first you weren't sure what the situation was, because he would listen to questions and just let us talk on and on. But as the class got further and further along, he increasingly insisted that we understand his approach. It was just a misunderstanding between the students and him. He just thought the other approaches that we brought into the class, all the other analytical tools, were things that we were going to forget about when we learned his way, and we were eventually going to be converted to his way. For the papers, you got an A if you regurgitated what he said, and you got a C or D if you didn't.

"He thought the purpose of the class was to read these epics, and to understand them the way he understands them, and that was the way we were to learn. And on one hand that's an interesting approach, that we were to absorb his viewpoint. But on the other hand, that's really a very authoritarian way to teach.... He just had no conception of the Berkeleyan way of education."

Although the student said the experience was "jarring," he also said it forced him to take a fresh look at "the American approach to education," a re-evaluation he found rewarding. As he put it, "His approach to education was educational itself."

Bringing Cosmopolitan Perspectives to Berkeley

Another student found her TAs "un-American" approach a blessing. The student was in an English class and she thought the professor, a very popular figure in the department, was exhibiting a very sexist approach in his presentation of the course material. She questioned his approach, and wrote her papers using interpretive tools borrowed from some of the latest French feminist critics. The professor found her complaints distracting and had little to say about her writing. But the TA in the class, who was Swiss and had studied the new French criticism, which is popular and respected in Europe, became the student's ally and teacher. "She was very well versed in feminist theory," the student said: "she had that background which you just cannot get in the United States."

In general, undergraduates find that foreign TAs add welcome variety to their experiences at the university. Their manner and style are different; their accents, examples and phrasing, though sometimes confounding, are interesting and "exotic"; and their European and Eastern educations can shed a new light on academic questions. Non-native TAs can give students a taste of another culture, which can itself be educational.

As one undergraduate observed, "I had a statistics class where the TA was from Brazil. The way I look at it you learn more from a class than just the material. Primarily you learn the course material, and secondarily about life in general. And this TA—in a statistics class for non-mathematical types—was excellent because he would use as examples for story problems his experiences from Brazil. It made it fascinating. You're learning about another culture at the same time you're learning statistics."

A Woman, a Foreigner, a TA

Jyoti Sanghera

I paused with my hand on the door knob, ostensibly to quell my thumping heartbeat and to collect myself. In that brief moment all the events of the past ten days hurriedly stumbled over each other in dizzying succession. Only ten days ago, I had landed in this country, this alien land, from New Delhi. And now, here I was on the threshold, ready to make my entrance as a TA assigned to young Berkeley undergraduates. "It is only normal that I am nervous," I tried to console myself. Squaring my shoulders and pushing my chin up, I attempted to draw upon my previous experience as a teacher. I suppose it worked, for I managed to enter the room with an apparent equanimity I was still far from genuinely feeling.

An Apprehensive Introduction

As I introduced myself and turned to the blackboard to inscribe my strange-sounding name, I saw myself mirrored through the eyes of these students I was supposed to teach. The look I encountered from all of them was an unmistakable combination of apprehension, curiosity and nervousness. Well, to that extent we were all kindred souls. But added to this, in the case of a few young men particularly, were distinct glances of amusement and even suspicion. I suppose I stood out very conspicuously in my distinct Indian attire, as a colored woman from the Third World who spoke English with a strange accent. This was a situation that merited getting used to on both my part and on the part of the students.

The introductory process was somewhat prolonged on account of my being a foreign TA and a woman. I found myself

responding to a host of queries ranging from general information on India to fairly incisive autobiographical details. For instance, I delved into India's colonial past and legacy in order to comment on their interrogative statement "How come as an Indian I spoke such fluent English?" I also had to embark on a brief lecture on the status of women in India, to break the stereotypical image of the downtrodden, silent suffering woman created by the media in the West. However, in the long run this rather arduous and protracted introduction went a long way in dispelling the initial doubts and creating an atmosphere of ease, acceptance and congeniality. My students were eager to brief me on the ways of American life and the problems faced by the university students.

Encountering Prejudice

This unique process of mutual learning marked my entire experience as a TA. My term as a TA happened to coincide with the occurrence of some political upheavals in India from which I was able to draw meaningful comparisons with the social structure in the West and generalize on the socio-political fiber of developing societies. While most of the students participated eagerly in such discussions, there were a few who were affronted and upset. Unfortunately, these dissenting voices were never aired and I became aware of their existence only after an informal evaluation when one of the students, presumably a male, ventured to assert that "This woman, this dumbo from a Third World country, from a society far less developed than the U.S.A., has the gall to stand up and criticize our country and say that she is going to put things in perspective."

I was frankly taken aback by this caustic criticism, especially because in none of the discussion sessions had I gotten wind of such hostility. Even though I am aware that this was a minority opinion, and by no means representative of the general attitude of the students, I would still advocate caution while expounding on the ills and evils afflicting American society. It may be advisable partially to couch one's criticism in softer language so as not to offend the sensibilities of some students. On the other hand, one must be wary of being intimidated by the presence of obnoxious, racist characters, a sprinkling of which may be found in each section.

Apart from the above reaction, as a woman and as a foreigner, I did not encounter any overt problems. In fact, I

found the women and minority students, including blacks, drawing much closer to me. Their sense of ease was decidedly reflected in their interaction with me during my office hours when they would come up to me without any inhibitions and often discuss their personal problems, apart from clarifying doubts on the course material.

While these gestures did create a friendly environment and made me feel good, I sensed the desirability of distancing myself somewhat from my students, especially for the expediency of grading. However, the minority students and women would make it a point to inform me of any protest meetings, conferences or events of public or political interest, and solicited my opinion on many of these issues.

It cannot be denied that a foreign woman TA has to be doubly cautious in dealing with the disadvantages she is burdened with by virtue of her status. I often wondered whether I was putting much more effort in preparing my sections than did the other TAs so as to prove myself. And to this day, I have not been able to ascertain whether I had relatively fewer students in my sections on account of my nationality and gender.

I would conclude by saying that the problems one has to cope with as a foreign woman TA are by no means insurmountable. As in every other field, in order to do well, one has to be open, receptive, human, sensitive and capable.

Advantages of Foreign Teaching Assistants

John Quansheng Zhao

It is true that foreign teaching assistants have more difficulties than their American counterparts, such as language barriers, cultural differences, etc. No doubt, every foreign TA must try very hard to overcome these problems. Yet there are not many people who realize that foreign TAs have their advantages as well, which stem from the same sources of disadvantages, i.e. different cultural and academic backgrounds.

Many academic branches require instructors and teaching assistants to have a broad background knowledge. This is particularly true in the social sciences and humanities. Needless to say, a native speaker would be an ideal TA for a foreign language class: a Japanese TA teaching Japanese, a Mexican TA teaching Spanish. Their advantages are obvious compared with their American counterparts who have studied, perhaps, three or four years of these foreign languages.

On many occasions, foreign TAs have their own advantages in studies that are closely related to their own home countries in such departments as Political Science, History, Sociology, Anthropology, Economics, and groups of area studies (Africa, Asia, Central America, and Europe).

Here I would like to refer to my own experiences. In the fall of 1984, I was TA for a Political Science upperdivision class "The American Role in the Far East" taught by Professor Robert A. Scalapino, director of the Institute of East Asian Studies at

Berkeley. This class concentrated on American foreign policy toward China, Japan, Korea, Vietnam, and the competition with the Soviet Union. In order to understand current American foreign policies, Professor Scalapino provided his class with tremendous historical background. About half of the students in this class had some knowledge about Asia. The other half were beginners. They had perhaps never heard of, for example, Dr. Sun Yat-sen, the leader of the 1911 Revolution and the founding father of the Republic of China.

As a graduate student from Beijing University, I had a solid knowledge about Chinese history and I was familiar with Asian culture and history. As a Ph.D. student in Political Science at Berkeley, East Asian Politics was one of my main fields, and I passed the qualifying examination in that field, so I was also familiar with American scholars' points of view. Thus I felt confident in being a TA for this class.

Exposing Students to Foreign Perspectives

At discussion sections, on the one hand, I organized discussions around the professor's lecture and assigned readings. On the other hand, I tried to provide different points of view from the perspective of various Asian countries.

Many students in this class were excited about the fact that they had a TA who was directly from Beijing, China. Since Sino-American relations was one of the most important aspects of American foreign policy with Asia, they were curious about what kind of comments a Chinese TA would give in many cases. Several times in discussion sections, I was asked for "personal opinions." My own background enabled me to answer virtually any question regarding Chinese politics. All these made the discussions more vivid and full of variety. Furthermore, about one-third of my office hour visitors were those who wanted to have a "chat" with me on various issues that may not have been directly related to the class. For example, the topic may have been the birth control policy in China, or the feelings of South Koreans towards China. By the end of the semester, I had made many new friends among the students. Both the students and I were enjoying this type of TA-student relationship, and both of us, I believe, learned a lot from this experience.

These advantages I have enjoyed as a foreign TA may be less important in fields that do not really need background

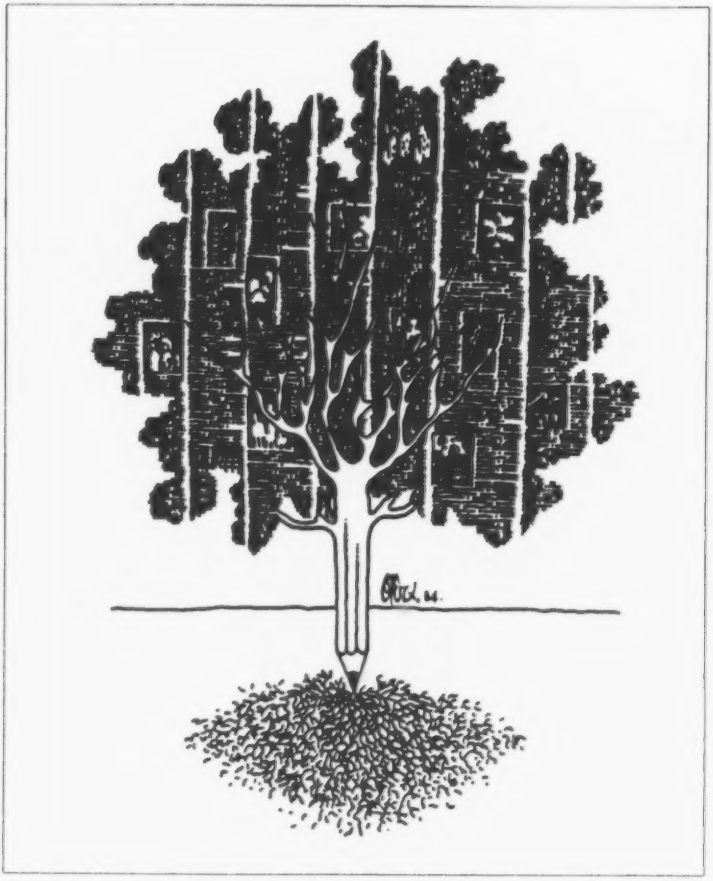
knowledge about the TA's home country. This is particularly true in sciences and technological fields such as mathematics, physics, computer science, electrical engineering, etc.

Technical Proficiency and Confidence

Asian TAs are the largest foreign TA group in these sciences and technological fields. It is true that most of these TAs (except perhaps those who are from India or Singapore) have had troubles with the English language, since they lacked a good English language environment at home. But on the other hand, these Asian graduate students have an unusually strong foundation in mathematics and science even before entering this country. Based on this solid foundation and rich experience they could provide undergraduate students with as much as their American counterparts do, if not more. Therefore, even in these fields foreign TAs can also find advantages.

This short article has emphasized the advantages of foreign TAs, because I want to encourage foreign TAs to be more confident about their capability of being good teachers in an American school. Certainly I am not going to ignore the difficulties that foreign TAs are facing. The most significant of these difficulties are language barriers and cultural differences. Foreign TAs should all work hard to improve their English proficiency, and try to understand American culture better. But since there have been few people who have addressed the issue of the advantages of foreign TAs, I would like to say a few words to foreign TAs at the end of this article: Try to make full use of your assets; it is not only that you need this TA job (for financial and practical training reasons), but also that you are needed.

Resources



As a foreign TA you may encounter numerous educational and employment problems, but you don't have to face them alone. A wide variety of campus programs and graduate organizations exist specifically to assist you. This network of resources is detailed in this section of the handbook. By familiarizing yourself with these resources, you will be better equipped to cope with your double function of student and instructor.

Oral Communication Resources

Barbara Gross Davis

U.C. Berkeley offers a variety of resources for Graduate Student Instructors (GSIs) whose first language is not English: semester-long courses, U.C. extension services, informal and formal tutoring, and audio and videotapes. You are encouraged to use these resources before you begin teaching. Once you have been appointed as a TA, it is a good idea to evaluate your language proficiency early in the semester, by audiotaping or videotaping yourself (available as a free service from the Educational Television Office, 642-2536) or by distributing a brief questionnaire to your students. Check to see if you have problems in intonation, phonology, presentation skills (e.g., not speaking up), sentence structure, pronunciation, and word choice. If you have difficulty in any of these areas, seek assistance from the resources described below.

Campus Courses

For more information on these courses, contact Ms. June McKay at 642-5975.

Subject A: 35A. Spoken English. (2 units for filing study list; 0 units toward graduation). Three 1-hour lecture/discussion classes and one 1-hour language laboratory per week. Work in English pronunciation, oral comprehension, and fluency. Though this is an undergraduate course, graduate students have enrolled in the past. Offered fall and spring semester.

Subject A: 35B. Spoken English. (2 units for filing study list; 0 units toward graduation). Three 1-hour lecture/discussion classes and one 1-hour language lab per week. Work in English pronunciation, oral comprehension, and fluency.

Though this is an undergraduate course, graduate students have enrolled in the past. Offered spring semester.

U.C. Extension Courses

Contact: Mr. Tony Vigo or Ms. Ellen Rosenfield at 642-9833.

Intensive Eight-Week Courses. These full-time courses offered in Berkeley (2425 Prospect St.) are designed to provide foreign students with the language skills needed for success in U.S. colleges and universities. Students receive instruction twenty-fours hours per week at all levels of proficiency. Courses are offered in grammar, composition, reading, listening and speaking. Students have the opportunity to study in such specialized areas as English for science and technology and English for business and economics. Fee: $1,000. Offered twice each semester, once at the beginning and once about eight weeks into the term. Arrangements can be made for taking only one of the classes, e.g., speaking. Fee is to be agreed upon.

Intensive Five-Week Courses. Shortened version of the eight-week courses. Students receive instruction for up to twenty-four hours per week. Fee: $840. Offered in the summer. Arrangements can be made to take any part of the course.

Speaking and Listening Skills. A course for visiting scholars, foreign students, and their spouses. Instruction is provided in the comprehension and pronunciation of English sounds along with practice in understanding everyday conversation and formal lectures. Emphasis is on the development of essential communication skills and the use of proper idiomatic English. Meets twice a week for two hours. Fee: $300. Offered in fall, spring and summer.

English for Professional Development. Several courses are offered for speakers of English as a second language who use English in their business or professional life. These courses meet for three hours once a week for ten weeks and are available in both Berkeley and San Francisco. Fee: $270 per course. Courses listed below are offered in the fall:

Accent Improvement. For non-native speakers who wish to pronounce American English with more ease and clarity.

Effective Spoken Communication. Provides opportunities to develop oral facility through small group discussions, individual oral presentations, role playing and other speaking exercises.

Powerful Vocabulary and Correct Grammar. Designed to strengthen the command of the grammatical forms of English used in speaking and writing.

Writing for Business. Students learn to write memos, letters, and reports.

Special Services. U.C. Extension will tailor courses to the needs of departments or groups and offer instruction on-site. For example, the math department has made arrangements with U.C. Extension to provide a special semester-long course for Math TAs. Fees and arrangements are to be agreed upon. U.C. Extension will also provide complimentary enrollments in the Berkeley classes to GSIs on a space available basis. Students must be referred by a faculty member.

Informal Tutoring

Linguistics 110. Introduction to phonetics and Phonology. This course is not for non-native speakers. One of the assignments in this class, however, requires students to interview an individual whose first language is not English to describe that language's sounds and structure. The instructor, through contacts with the English as a Second Language program, identifies students whose first language is not English who would be willing to be interviewed in exchange for some tutoring. These students are then paired with Linguistics 110 students. The 110 students interview the non-native speakers (minimum 5 hours). In exchange, the 110 students tutor the non-native speakers in English (for the same amount of time they were interviewed). The course, offered every fall, enrolls about 60 students and approximately 40 students are paired. (Contact: Professor John Ohala, 642-4938)

"English in Action" Volunteer Program. The Y-House (on Bancroft) provides opportunities for non-native speakers to improve their English by conversing with a native-born English speaking volunteers. The Y-House arranges preliminary interviews with non-English speaking individuals and matches them up with volunteers. The non-native speaker and volunteer then arrange their own program for meeting and conversing. This service, in operation for several years, charges no fee and accepts volunteers and non-native speakers at any time. Sometimes the program is short of English-speaking volunteers. (Contact: Ms. Kitty Wallace, 848-6370 on Tuesdays or Wednesdays, 10am-4pm)

English-as-a-Second Language Program. Ms. June McKay, coordinator of the program, periodically knows of students who would be willing to tutor non-native speakers. (Contact: Ms. June McKay, 642-5975)

Exchange Language Lessons. Students who are non-native speakers can contact the department on campus that teaches their native language to identify graduate students interested in serving as English tutors in exchange for language lessons.

Formal Tutoring

Student Learning Center. The Student Learning Center (SLC) does not offer drop-in tutoring or individual consultation to ESL TAs, since SLC tutoring is primarily course-based. However, the Student Learning Center is willing to tailor small group instruction to the needs of departments or GSIs. Arrangements can be made through Ms. Melanie Hahn (642-7332).

Linguistics Department. The graduate adviser in the Linguistics Department may know of Linguistics graduate students who would be interested in tutoring Teaching Assistants whose first language is not English, either for a fee or for the opportunity to interview these students about their language's structure. The Linguistics Department is exploring the feasibility for offering instruction to its graduate students in teaching English as a second language. (Contact: Professor John Ohala, 642-4938)

Departmental-Based Interventions

Buddy Pairing. Departments could assign an experienced GSI whose first language is English to each new GSI whose first language is not English. The buddy's responsibilities might include visiting the new GSI's class and making suggestions on how the material might be presented more effectively. The buddy GSI could be a work-study student. It is unknown whether any departments currently do buddy pairing.

Tutoring. Departments could identify students in their departments who would be available to tutor GSIs whose first language is not English. The advantage of these tutors over other tutoring services is that they would be in the GSI's disciplinary area. The tutors could be paid through work-study.

Audiovisual Services

Language Laboratory. Located in the basement in Dwinelle (B-50), the Language Lab has a variety of self-study tapes for speakers whose first language is not English. The tapes vary in length and in difficulty level (from beginning to advanced) and are most useful in conjunction with tutoring so that students can receive feedback on their progress. The reference desk in the Language Lab has a list of all available tapes. The Language Lab is open Monday through Thursday, 8am-6pm; Friday, 8am-5pm; and Saturday, 10am-2pm. (Contact: Ms. Victoria Williams, 642-0767)

Educational Television Office. While the ETV office does not have anything directly designed for non-native speakers per se, they do have videotapes of TAs and faculty members teaching in various disciplines. These videotapes might be used in conjunction with other services. The campus has also recently purchased a series of twenty 15-minute tapes produced by UCLA on effective teaching. Each tape covers a different aspect of teaching, e.g., motivating students, helping students learn from their errors. The UCLA videotapes and others related to teaching have been reviewed and catalogued by the Student Learning Center. (Contact: Ms. Amy Edwards of the Student Learning Center, 642-7332, for the listing, or the Educational Television Office, 642-2536)

Private School Opportunities

The quality of these schools is unknown. If you wish to use their services, you should investigate them carefully.

American English Center of Armstrong College. The College offers English as a second language courses in El Cerrito (1800 Elm St.). Students have the option of one, two or three classes per day (ranging from $165 to $495). Courses are offered every quarter. (Contact: American English Center of Armstrong College, 848-2500)

Language Studies, Inc. A chain of schools with branches in most major cities. The Berkeley branch offers everyday conversational English (elementary to advanced) in small group or individual instruction. Classes are offered in four-week sessions throughout the year and meet five days a week for four or six hours per day. Fee: $450-$555 per month. (Contact: Language Studies, Inc., 841-4695)

Peer Counseling and Support for Foreign TAs

Ron Robin and Alan Cox

The Graduate Assembly (GA), U.C. Berkeley's graduate student government, and the Association of Graduate Student Employees (AGSE), the union representing graduate student employees, offer a variety of services for solving TA-related problems, including the unique issues facing foreign TAs. The GA assists in resolving academic disputes, while AGSE offers support in the field of labor relations.

Over the years, the University of California's emphasis on research over teaching has led to considerable dissatisfaction with the quality of undergraduate education. Confronted with crowded sections, large and impersonal lecture classes, and relatively inexperienced TAs, students have a natural tendency to seek scapegoats for this state of affairs.

As vulnerable targets, foreign TAs have borne disproportionate blame for distinctly administrative failures in the field of TA preparation. Although no systematic study of teaching problems among foreign TAs has ever been done, almost every academic report on teaching at Berkeley cites the poor English skills of non-American TAs as a significant problem.

In response, the GA commissioned a survey which concluded that a wide range of issues—from dissatisfaction with grades to the existence of cultural barriers—have been heaped indiscriminately under the heading of poor English language skills. In support of foreign TAs, and as part of a continuous effort to alleviate their difficulties, the GA's TA Training Project initiated a series of workshops for foreign TAs, and is publishing this handbook.

The GA, in conjunction with AGSE, also offers help to foreign TAs in resolving unfair treatment or criticism within their departments. An example of inappropriate censuring of foreign TAs occurred in one of the professional schools during the spring semester, 1985, when students complained about the quality of teaching in their program. Some of their concerns dealt with the quality of foreign TAs and their language ability. While there is no way of assessing the validity of these grievances—this particular school mandates no formal feedback from its students, such as student evaluations at the end of the semester—the school decided to ignore all complaints except those concerning the language difficulties of foreign TAs. Although the TAs invited their department chair to assess the problems through classroom visits, no such visits were ever made.

Instead, the school instituted a new set of guidelines that imposed new requirements on foreign TAs, including a questionable oral evaluation of their language skills, and mandatory courses in English as a second language. The graduate students were not consulted on these issues, nor did the department address any of the other teaching concerns originally raised by its students.

With the help of AGSE and the GA, TAs in this school organized to protest this action and proposed, instead, a plan which addressed language barriers as an integral part of an all-encompassing TA training seminar for the departmental TAs.

Currently, the GA is investigating the burden of out-of-state tuition fees that foreign students have to pay even during the tenure of a teaching assistantship. We invite you to visit us at Anthony Hall to meet our officers and staff, voice your opinions on this and other matters, and allow us to assist in resolving your concerns.

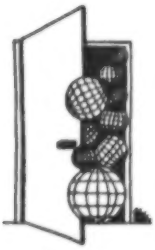
But beyond problems relating to language or fee waivers, you are likely to face a host of other difficulties as an employee of the university. Some departments have hiring policies that look identical to patronage systems. Others, because of uncertain undergraduate enrollment, hire TAs at the last possible moment, which means that they will probably not be paid on time. As a TA you will be denied the health insurance benefits enjoyed by other U.C. employees working fifty percent time or more. Indeed, the administration contends that, as a TA, you have no employee rights at all; they regard you as a

financial aid recipient, not an employee with rights under state law. Without such rights, you have no means of contesting unilateral administrative decisions about the terms and conditions of your employment.

AGSE was formed in 1983 to address precisely the problems that graduate students face as employees. AGSE has succeeded in getting pay increases for TAs and RAs. It convinced the administration to create a late paycheck expeditor in California Hall. AGSE prompted the administration to distribute copies of the grievance procedure and job descriptions to every department on campus so that graduate student employees would know their rights and responsibilities. AGSE currently is interested in winning health insurance for graduate student employees; it is trying also to get fee waivers for such employees. Most fundamentally, AGSE hopes to provide graduate student employees with some say in decisions about the terms and conditions of employment. You can help yourself as a TA by supporting AGSE.

Advisers to Foreign Students and Scholars Office (AFSSO)

Ted Goode



Most foreign students have contact with this office prior to and upon arrival in Berkeley. Many students continue to use the visa and advising services throughout their degree programs. Some students take advantage of the financial aid advising and assistance available through this office, but only a handful of students take advantage of the full range of advising, counseling and resource referral services offered. We encourage you to become familiar with and take advantage of the help available to you through the AFSSO.

The AFSSO is a University of California student service office funded totally by the University to address the administrative, academic and personal concerns of foreign students. As such the office plays an important role in assisting every student with issues that arise during their years here.

Being a TA means that you will be in close proximity to many young undergraduate students. As teacher and friend of these young people, you may be called upon to be tutor and/or counselor. As a caring person you may wish to offer your expertise. As a student yourself, however, you may not be able to commit sufficient time to improve basic skill deficiencies. The Adviser's Office sees itself as a resource for this type of discussion and problem solving. It also is in a strategic position to introduce you and, through you, your students to campus services that can provide skill development services and counseling.

Using departmental sources of counseling assistance is encouraged. However, there are times when counseling or advice from a person not associated with the department is useful. Often, the issue to be discussed is personally sensitive or one which if raised within the department might be politically detrimental to the student. Here again the Adviser's Office is a valuable resource. The office is committed to the student and not to the department and any conversation with an adviser is held in *strict confidence.*

You are a foreign student and you will be teaching predominantly American undergraduates. There is in the interaction between you and them an inter-cultural dimension. This inter-cultural dimension is the answer to this question: What is it like to bring people from different countries and cultures together? Being an instrument for education and experience in this dimension can and will increase Americans' learning more about the world and your learning more about American ways. The Adviser's Office is helpful in identifying ways you may be able to capitalize on your experience in this important areas.

We encourage you to view the AFSSO and its staff as an office committed to your welfare. Seek assistance and counsel from them for yourself as a student, as a teaching assistant and as a person. Take advantage of all the services, resources, and expertise it has to offer.

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82